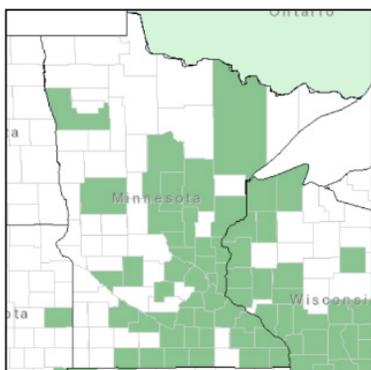


# Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

## Family: Milkweed (*Asclepiadaceae*)

**DESCRIPTION:** Butterfly milkweed grows throughout Minnesota in open, dry areas such as roadsides, fields and prairies. It is distinguished by its bushy stem arrangement and bright orange flowers that bloom June through July. Milkweeds are named for their latex sap; the milky substance contains cardiac glycoside toxins, which are toxic or distasteful to many invertebrates and mammals.

**USES:** Butterfly milkweed is a fantastic addition to home gardens and habitat projects because of its benefit to pollinators. Despite its toxicity, it's a larval host for the monarch butterfly, which feeds exclusively on species in the *Asclepias* genus. Its flowers provide high-quality nectar for other pollinators including bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Historically, milkweed was used in treating pleurisy and other pulmonary ailments.



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: Dan Shaw, BWSR

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** None

**ID:** Bushier than other native Minnesota milkweeds and growing up to 3 feet tall, plants usually are composed of a cluster of hairy stems. Fine hairs cover the long, narrow leaves. The flat-topped flower umbels are most often bright orange, but vary from yellow to red.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** Early season butterfly milkweed stems look like Canadian horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*). Horseweed's leaves are widest in the middle, and taper at both ends. Butterfly milkweed's taper to a point at one end; the widest part of its leaf is near the stem.

## Planting Recommendations

Butterfly milkweed grows well in full sun with dry, well-drained soil. This milkweed species tends to be favored in home gardens because of its orange flowers and its short stature (compared with common milkweed or swamp milkweed). Its height makes it a good front-of-the-garden choice for a small space. It pairs well with little bluestem grass, pale purple coneflower, aromatic aster and prairie smoke. Its seeds must be

subject to a period of cold before germinating, so it is best to plant them in the fall or to place them in the freezer four to six weeks before planting. To give the plants a head start, consider plugs or 4-inch containers. Milkweed's deep taproots make it difficult to transplant once it's established. Plants tend to spread, but not aggressively. The striking orange color is often seen scattered throughout midsummer prairies.

- REFERENCES:**
- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
  - [Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
  - [USDA Plants Database](#)

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