

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

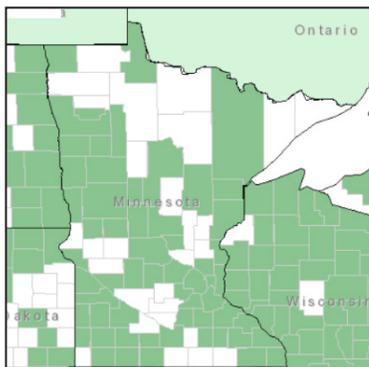
Family: Milkweed (*Apocynaceae*)

DESCRIPTION: Common milkweed is one of the most prevalent milkweed species in Minnesota. The native perennial feeds a wide range of pollinators including monarch butterflies, which can smell new flowers' strong scent from as far as a mile away.

USES: Common milkweed is a great addition to habitat projects because it benefits a wide range of insects and pollinators. Despite its toxicity, it serves as a larval host for the monarch butterfly, which feeds exclusively on species in the *Asclepias* genus. Its flowers provide high-quality nectar for bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Historically, the plant was used to treat pleurisy and other pulmonary ailments.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
[USDA Plants Database](#)
[US Forest Service](#)



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: BWSR

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: GP: UPL; MW: FACU; NCNE: UPL

ID: Plants grow 2 to 6 feet tall. Large, opposite, oval leaves taper to a point; soft, fine hairs cover their undersides. The flowers, round umbels ranging from pale pink to deep mauve, bloom June through early August. Seed pods form in late August. Each dries and cracks open, releasing white tufted seeds carried by the wind.

Planting Recommendations

Common milkweed prefers sunny, well-drained sites, and grows well in disturbed areas. One of the easiest milkweed species to establish, it spreads rapidly from seed or containers. Its seeds require cold stratification before germinating, so it is best to plant them in late fall or to keep them in the freezer for four to six weeks before planting. Seed should be planted about a quarter-inch deep outside or in containers. Peat pots work well, as transplanting them

directly decreases transplant shock. Common milkweed is often seeded in larger pollinator meadows or prairie restorations. It can be added to pocket plantings, where it can be pulled out by hand if its spread by rhizome becomes too aggressive. Its height and the texture of its wide, toothless oblong leaves complement larger forbs and grasses such as Joe Pye weed, cut-leaf coneflower, New England aster and little bluestem.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Purple milkweed's (*Asclepias purpurascens*) flowers are darker. Sullivant's milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*) has smooth, hairless leaves. The stem and leaf structure of Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*), a plant in the dogbane family, look similar early in the season, and its broken stems or leaves release a milky sap. But Indian hemp has smooth, waxy leaves. Its stems branch out; its flowers are white.



Lukens

Developed by Laura Lukens

As Monarch Joint Venture's national monitoring coordinator, Laura Lukens deals with research and monitoring projects. She leads nationwide implementation of the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program and habitat restoration research.