

# Poke milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*)

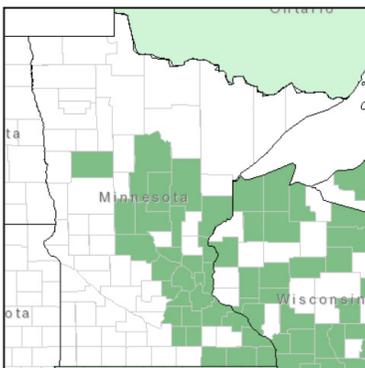
## Family: Milkweed (*Asclepiadaceae*)

**DESCRIPTION:** The most shade-tolerant milkweed species in Minnesota, it often grows along forest edges or woodland openings. It is best characterized by its long, egg-shaped leaves and white/pink droopy flowers dispersed along its stem.

**USES:** Poke milkweed is a great species to include in pollinator gardens, especially in partial shade. Although their milky latex contains cardenolide toxins, milkweed plants are the sole food source for monarch larvae. Their flowers provide high-quality nectar for many pollinators including bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Historically, milkweed was used for its medicinal properties in treating pleurisy and other pulmonary ailments.

### REFERENCES:

- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
- [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
- [USDA Plants Database](#)



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: Ariana Loehr, Monarch Joint Venture

### STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:

GP: FAC,  
MW: UPL,  
NCNE: UPL

**ID:** Poke milkweed grows 3 to 6 feet tall. Its large, opposite, oval leaves taper to a point. Leaves are sometimes wavy at the edges, and typically feel flimsy compared with those of other milkweed species. White or light pink flower umbels hang in droopy clusters along the stem.

## Planting Recommendations

Unlike other milkweed species, shade-tolerant poke milkweed thrives in dappled sun. It favors moderately moist soils. At 4 feet tall, it's a good back-of-the-garden option in native plantings. Seeds require a period of cold stratification to break dormancy. It's best to plant them in the

fall, or freeze them four to six weeks before planting. Containerized plants, more common now at native plant nurseries, may be planted in spring, early summer or fall. Fall plantings require enough water to keep roots moist over winter. Milkweeds' deep taproots make them hard to transplant once established.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) plants can appear similar, especially before blooming. Common milkweed leaves are thicker and rougher. Its umbels are full, round and upright, whereas poke milkweed's drooping umbels are lighter, with fewer flowers.



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### 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.