

# Milkweed Gardens for Monarchs

Monarch butterflies are the most well-known butterfly in North America. Unfortunately, populations of monarchs have severely declined in the past 20 years. The good news is that there is something you can do to help. In Nebraska, one of the biggest threats to monarchs is the reduction of milkweeds, which is the monarch caterpillar's only food. You can help reverse the decline of monarchs by planting milkweed around your home or in surrounding landscapes. There are several milkweed species that occur locally and can be readily planted for monarchs. As adults, monarchs drink nectar from many flowers, so it is important to also provide a variety of plants that bloom from June until frost. By taking these actions to help monarchs, you will also benefit other pollinators!



## Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

This plant is aptly named as it is the most common milkweed in the state. These tall plants have large pink-purple flower heads with an attractive color and scent. They bloom June through August. This shade-intolerant plant requires much sunlight and moist soil. Usually growing from three to five feet in height, this milkweed sometimes towers to eight feet. This is a rather prolific plant that spreads readily via rhizomes, so gardeners will need to be vigilant if they wish to keep it in check.

## Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

Butterfly weed, sometimes called orange milkweed, has large, flat-topped clusters of yellow-orange to bright orange flowers which bloom from May to September. This plant requires fairly moist soil and plenty of sunlight. Although the monarch caterpillars may not use this plant as often as other milkweed species, butterfly weed should be a staple in gardens as its beautiful flowers attract many other butterflies.



## Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)

Sometimes referred to as the pink milkweed, this plant is our only wetland-inhabiting milkweed. Flourishing in shallow marshes and other damp sites, this perennial has blossoms composed of small, rose-colored flowers. On occasion, snow-white flowers are seen. The pink flowers are clustered at the top of a tall, branching stem and bloom from June to October.

## Whorled Milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)

Blooming from May to September, this particular milkweed boasts small, greenish-white flowers in flat-topped clusters. Because this species is one of the last milkweeds to die back as the season progresses, it is a common late-season host plant for monarch larvae. The whorled milkweed is one of the most broadly distributed in the U.S. and is adapted to a variety of soil types.



## Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)

This milkweed has large, oval, blue-green leaves and spherical clusters of rose-colored flowers at the top of the stem. The blooming period is from May to September. This milkweed prefers sun but is shade-tolerant, and generally grows well in moderately moist soil.

## Sullivant's Milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*)

Named after William Starling Sullivant in the 1840s, Sullivant's milkweed is also known as prairie milkweed and is found mostly in the Midwest. This species is a perennial with deep, fleshy rhizomes flowering by mid-July with fruits maturing through August. It grows primarily in undisturbed native lowland prairies and is declining as a result of habitat loss. This milkweed reputedly has high rubber content in its milky latex sap, and has been investigated for use in rubber production.



## Green Milkweed (*Asclepias viridis*)

The green milkweed is sometimes referred to as green antelope-horn. This perennial blooms from May to August and produces white flowers, generally with one flower head per plant. Upon close inspection, some rose or purple color is evident in the center of each individual flower. The latex-like sap exuded when a leaf or stem is damaged is very sticky, and appears much like Elmer's glue.

## Diverse Blooming Flowers

As adults, monarchs drink nectar from many flowers, so maintaining a variety of plants that bloom from June until the frost is important for monarchs and will benefit many other pollinator species.

