

Together Let's Grow the Monarch Butterfly Population

Monarch butterflies are iconic insects and pollinators whose bright orange and black, white-dotted wings and animated flutter enchant their many admirers. They embark on long journeys, with some eastern monarchs traveling as far as 3,000 miles from southern Canada to central Mexico.

Each fall butterflies migrate south, then in spring they travel to breeding areas and start the cycle all over again. Unfortunately, monarch numbers have plummeted. In the case of western monarchs, the Xerces Society estimates that the number making the annual journey has dropped by more than 95 percent in recent years.

REASONS FOR THE MONARCH DECLINE

Conversion of breeding and overwintering habitat for uses such as agriculture, along with adverse land management practices and climate change, has sharply reduced the biomass of milkweed plants, the exclusive hosts for egg-laying adults and their hungry larvae.



ASCLEPIAS FASCICULARIS

THE BENEFITS OF PLANTING MILKWEED

Planting milkweed in monarch breeding areas, which covers a large portion of the U.S., is one way we can encourage their rebound.

To establish a thriving butterfly habitat in your garden, monarch advocates recommend planting several milkweed plants to attract the attention of flying adults and support the voracious appetites of caterpillars. It's important to also provide an array of nectar-loaded plants with different bloom times to give monarchs the fuel they need to reproduce and migrate.

In addition to benefiting the monarch population, milkweed plants provide food and shelter for other wildlife and pollinators such as bees, hummingbirds, wasps, and non-monarch butterflies.



Milkweed Plants Native to Your Region

CALIFORNIA & ARIZONA



Asclepias fascicularis

Also known as narrow leaf milkweed or Mexican whorled milkweed, *Asclepias fascicularis* is native to Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. This perennial plant boasts narrow, long-pointed leaves and produces clusters of lavender to lavender-tinged white flowers, blooming from June to September. The plant grows 1 to 3 feet tall with similar spread. Narrow leaf milkweed goes dormant in winter, typically dying back to the ground. Dormancy and dieback are beneficial, encouraging adult monarchs to get a move on at the end of breeding season. The plant will pop back up in spring. Prefers full sun and tolerates low to high moisture as well as lean to heavy soil.



ASCLEPIAS FASCICULARIS



ASCLEPIAS INCARNATA

ILLINOIS



Asclepias incarnata

Commonly called swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata* thrives in moisture-rich areas in a big swath of the U.S., including nearly all counties of Illinois. State habitats include floodplain forests, thickets, marshes, drainage ditches, and swamps. This clump-forming perennial forms narrow, lance-shaped leaves that taper off to a point and produces small pink to mauve or light purple flowers with a cinnamon-like scent. They appear in tight clusters at the ends of stems in summer. The plant grows 4 to 5 feet tall and spreads 2 to 3 feet. Leaves turn red and purple in fall, adding interest as the seed pods develop. When leaves turn brown, the plant can be cut back to the ground, but this is only for aesthetics. Prefers full to part sun and moist to wet soil.



**SMART
PLANET**
Drought Tolerant Plants

TEXAS



Asclepias incarnata

Commonly called swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata* thrives in moisture-friendly habitats such as wet meadows, marshes, along the edges of lakes and streams, and in swamps in a big swath of the U.S. This clump-forming perennial forms narrow, lance-shaped leaves that taper off to a point and produces small pink to mauve or light purple flowers with a cinnamon-like scent. They appear in tight clusters at the ends of stems in summer. The plant grows 4 to 5 feet tall and spreads 2 to 3 feet. Leaves turn red and purple in fall, adding interest as the seed pods develop. When leaves turn brown, the plant can be cut back to the ground, but this is only for aesthetics. Prefers full to part sun and moist to wet soil.



ASCLEPIAS INCARNATA



ASCLEPIAS ASPERULA

Asclepias asperula

Nicknamed antelopehorns because of horn-like form of its seed pods, *Asclepias asperula* ssp. *capricornu* is native to Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah. It thrives in prairies, brushlands, plains, hillsides, and woodlands. This clump-forming perennial forms narrow, long, thick leaves that are often folded lengthwise; the stems are densely covered with tiny hairs. Flowers begin appearing in April. The flower heads are quite an ornamental sight: greenish-yellow with white and maroon. The plant flowers most heavily in spring, continuing into summer and fall. The plant grows 1 to 2 feet tall and spreads 2 to 3 feet. Prefers full sun and dry to moist rocky or sandy soils. Aim for medium water to achieve an attractive, full appearance.



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Drought Tolerant Plants

TEXAS



Asclepias speciosa

Known as showy milkweed, *Asclepias speciosa* is native to much of the western half of the U.S., found in savannas, prairies, along roadsides, in fields, and meadows. This is a notably hairy and erect thick-stemmed perennial that can grow 4 to 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide, though may stay smaller. The large, pointed, banana-like leaves have a velvety texture. The eye-catching furry flowers are pale pink to pinkish-purple and begin appearing in midspring, lasting into September. Provide full sun and dry to moist well-drained soil. While the plant cannot tolerate shade, it isn't too fussy about soils, so those with some clay should be OK.



ASCLEPIAS SPECIOSA



ASCLEPIAS VIRIDIS

Asclepias viridis

Known as green antelopehorn or green milkweed, *Asclepias viridis* is native to a sizable swath of the U.S., from Ohio to Florida and Nebraska to Texas. It thrives in upland prairies, open woods, pastures, glades, ditches, disturbed areas, and limestone soils. This perennial milkweed develops multiple unbranched upright stems. The leaves are lance shaped to oval shaped and have wavy margins. The gorgeous flower clusters are light green with touches of purple and white. They begin appearing in March, lasting through September. The plant grows 1/2 to 2 1/2 feet tall and spreads 1 to 2 feet. Provide full to part sun. The plant is at home in sandy, rocky, or clayish soils. Aim for medium water to achieve an attractive, full appearance.



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Drought Tolerant Plants

Milkweed Planting & Care Instructions



01.

Dig a hole as deep as the pot and twice as wide.

02.

Carefully remove the plant from the pot, taking care not to disturb the root ball.

03.

Place the plant in the hole at soil level or slightly above and backfill the hole with native soil.

04.

Water well. Continue to water regularly to establish the plant. There's no need to fertilize your milkweed plant.

05.

Note when caring for your milkweed plant: It's perfectly normal to see yellow aphids (milkweed or oleander aphids) on milkweed. They are not usually cause for concern. Trying to remove aphids may end up dislodging monarch eggs or harming caterpillars that are on the plant. Other insects you might spot include the red-and-white milkweed bug.

06.

Precaution when caring for your milkweed plant: Milkweeds emit a milky sap with toxins that makes caterpillars and monarch butterflies unpalatable to predators. Take care to keep the sap out of your eyes. As a precaution, always wash your hands after handling milkweed.



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