

Milkweeds for the Garden



Milkweed is the larval host plant of the monarch butterfly. This family of plants is the only plant the monarch larvae will feed on, it is host specific. Without milkweed the butterfly stage of the monarch has no place to lay its eggs as Monarchs will not lay eggs on any plant except milkweed. They taste the plants with their feet.

Local Milkweed Sources:

More and more Nursery and Garden Centers in the area stock milkweed but it is in high-demand and sells out quickly. Call before you go. Remember to verify, by asking the nursery, that the plants you buy are pesticide-free also, remember to not treat your pollinator plants with any insecticides.



monarch larvae

Milkweed Varieties Suitable for Kansas City Area Gardens



Butterfly Milkweed

Asclepias tuberosa, or butterfly milkweed, is the most commonly-planted member of this family in Kansas City area gardens. Butterfly milkweed is a perennial in the garden reaching about 2 feet in height while maintaining a nice, rounded habit. The plant is prized for its early summer flowering. This is a well-mannered plant as it forms a clump and does not spread. It grows best in well drained soils but will tolerate poor soil conditions. As a native it is extremely drought-tolerant. In fact, wet soil conditions may be its only downfall. It prefers full sun.

Swamp Milkweed

Asclepias incarnata, or swamp milkweed, is a native perennial plant that, as the name implies, will tolerate and prefers to grow in moist, boggy soils. It can reach a height of 3- to 4-feet flowering during the summer in pink. It is also a great choice for the home garden as it is a clumping milkweed. Swamp milkweed is a good source of nectar so adults of many butterfly species will visit this plant in the garden.





Green Antelopehorn Milkweed

Asclepias viridis, or green antelopehorn milkweed, is one of the lesser-known plants in this family. It was a common perennial in our pastures and along the roadsides. This milkweed will reach a couple of feet tall and wide. It is a clump-forming plant that does not spread which is a good garden feature. It grows best in well-drained soils and is considered very heat- and drought-tolerant.

Whorled Milkweed

Asclepias verticillata is commonly called whorled milkweed. This plant is easily grown in average, dry to medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun. It tolerates part shade but does best in sunny locations with sandy loams. Whorled milkweed is drought-tolerant and easily grown from seed, but it will self-seed in the landscape if seed pods are not removed prior to splitting open. This variety likes hot, dry soils, but tolerates moist garden



Tropical Milkweed



Asclepias curassavica goes by either tropical or blood milkweed. Unlike the other plants mentioned, and as the name implies, this one is not native to the Kansas City area and is an annual. Tropical milkweed can be grown from seed or purchased in the spring as a transplant for the garden. This plant will reach 3 feet or more in a summer. It grows best in full-sun but will tolerate very light shade and requires even moisture for best growth. It is considered fairly drought- and heat-tolerant.

Balloon Milkweed

Asclepias physocarpa goes by several common names. Balloon milkweed is the more family-friendly name. Unlike the other milkweed this one forms a light green, rounded puffy pod with soft prickly-like structures. The entire pod is about the size of a ping pong ball. This annual milkweed is big; reaching 5 feet or more in a garden. Give it room to grow. The plant is not showy and does not have the best form. It is best planted in the back of the bed hidden by more attractive plants. It requires the same culture as the tropical milkweed.



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