

Common Milkweed

Asclepias Syriaca

Look for Common Milkweed in sunny areas, especially along the south side of Middleton.



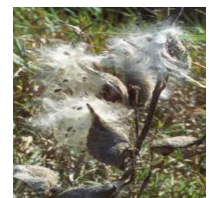
The milkweed family of plants is named after Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, because of their widespread use in folk-medicines. The syriaca, known as Common Milkweed, gets its name from the plant's milky white sap. Common Milkweed has been used throughout history by Native Americans as food and medicine, and for making cords, ropes, and a coarse cloth. Various tribes mixed milkweed with other herbs to create remedies for backache, bee stings, warts, ringworm, stomach complaints, chest discomfort, and rheumatism. Some tribes used the plant as a contraceptive, while others used it to prevent hemorrhage after childbirth and to enhance postpartum milk flow. Plentiful throughout the American prairie, Common Milkweed was prized as a remedy for literally dozens of human complaints.

Common Milkweed continues to be an important nectar source for native bees, wasps, and other beneficial insects, especially Monarch butterflies. Milkweed leaves are the **only** food source for Monarch butterfly larvae, and extensive use of herbicides has destroyed so much common milkweed that the Monarch population has dropped 90% since 1997. State and federal programs are now underway to re-establish milkweed "way stations" throughout the U.S. to restore the Monarch population and assist the butterfly's annual migration to the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico. We can all be proud that the milkweed on our property is helping in the effort to save the Monarch from extinction. We have even shared some of our plants with the Avon Lake Garden Club for their own Monarch restoration project.

Common Milkweed is a perennial herb growing up to 6' tall on a sturdy green stalk that turns deep red in the fall. The deep green oblong leaves are generally opposite with smooth margins and a pale green downy underside. When any part of the plant is broken, a sticky white sap oozes from the wound. Small (1/2") soft lavender-pink flowers occur in spherical clusters 2"-4" across. A pale green pod up to 5" long and covered with pointed bumps protects the seeds as they mature. The pod turns brown, splits lengthwise, and releases tufts of silky white filaments that carry the seeds aloft on the wind. Milkweed blooms July through September.



On a historic note, milkweed played an important role during World War II when over 5,000 tons of milkweed floss were collected in the U. S. for use in flotation devices for military personnel. Today, milkweed is grown commercially as a hypoallergenic filling for pillows and for use in cleaning up oil spills.



We also have some Swamp Milkweed growing on our property. It looks very much like common milkweed except that its leaves are longer (7") and more pointed, and its flower is smaller, brighter pink, and a bit more fragrant. Swamp milkweed blooms June-October.

