



March of the Milkweeds Eastern Region 2010 Accomplishments

Milkweeds are herbaceous, perennial, and more or less poisonous. The genus (*Asclepias*) contains about 140 known species, most of which are native to America. Milkweeds derive their name from the milky juice containing latex, alkaloids, and cardenoides – the last of which renders Monarch butterfly larvae and adults toxic and bitter tasting to many vertebrate predators. Adult Monarchs store toxic cardenoides consumed by eating milkweed leaves as larvae. Oddly enough the “Father of Modern Taxonomy” Linnaeus named the genus after Asclepias the Greek god of healing, because of the numerous folks remedies associated with milkweeds. Milkweed flowers are also important nectar sources for bees and other nectar seeking insects.

There are approximately 22 milkweed species found in the Eastern US ranging from aquatic habitats to dry prairies. Our Eastern Region Forests are actively adding the following 11 milkweeds to their Native Plant & Pollinator Gardens, collecting seed, propagating and out-planting milkweeds and adding milkweed seed to mixes used in rehabilitation and restoration. Those species labeled * are greatest use to Monarch larvae:

1. Sand milkweed/ *Asclepias amplexicaulis*
2. Poke milkweed/ *A. exaltata*
3. Swamp milkweed/ *A. incarnata**
4. Tall green milkweed/ *A. hirtella**
5. Mead’s milkweed/ *A. meadii*
6. Purple milkweed/ *A. purpurescens**
7. Prairie milkweed/ *A. sullivanti*
8. Common milkweed/ *A. syriaca**
9. Whorled milkweed/ *A. verticillata**
10. Short green milkweed/ *A. viridiflora**
11. Butterfly milkweed/ *A. tuberosa**



Figure 1. Butterfly weed



Eastern Region USFS