

Monarchs and Milkweed



At Prairie Restorations we are overjoyed customers are heeding the call to provide Monarch habitat; and coming into our retail stores to obtain their milkweed. We'd like to share some additional information to assist you in making the best purchase:

In order to most effectively aid recovery of the Monarch population it is essential to do two things:

- 1) Plant the Milkweed species that is right for your cultural conditions: sun exposure, soil type and soil moisture.
- 2) Plant a variety of Native Plants which bloom throughout the growing season (spring - fall), to offer food sources (nectar) and habitat for adult monarchs and other beneficial native pollinators: bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, wasps and flies.

This month's newsletter will focus on Step #1, choosing the right milkweed species. July's Newsletter will highlight numerous other pollinator friendly plants.

But before we get to the Milkweeds, it is important to distinguish the differences between insects which are "attracted" to certain plants, insects which have specialized (obligate) relationships with specific plants, and which insect species actually pollinate plants. These plant-insect interactions can be highly specialized or more generalized. However, it is crucial to note, that NATIVE plants form the foundation of the food web, and our NATIVE insects have CO-EVOLVED with them. Our native insects often cannot utilize non-native, ornamental plants to complete their life cycles.

For example: Monarch Butterflies have an OBLIGATE larval host; Milkweed species. Adult Monarch Butterflies lay their eggs on the underside of leaves. Monarch Caterpillars consume milkweed foliage and flowers before pupating. Without Milkweed species, an adult monarch can feed on any number of plants, [Blazing Stars](#), [Wild Bergamot](#), etc., however, they are unable to lay their eggs on any of these plants in order to further the species.

The nectar produced in milkweed flowers lures and attracts numerous visitors: wasps, bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, bugs, ants and flies. The insects utilize the flowers resources, but may offer nothing in return (pollination).

The flowers of Milkweed species are primarily pollinated by bees and wasps. Butterflies and moths are secondary (less effective) pollinators of milkweed species.

Pollination in its simplest terms, occurs when pollen is transferred from one flower to another, facilitating the production of seed.

Point being, no one species stands alone. Every species is connected and linked and native plant diversity equals a more resilient and stable system, which benefits pollinators, insects, monarchs, birds and so on up the food chain.

PRI Carries Five Species of Native Milkweed

Poke Milkweed (*Asclepias exalta*)



Plant Information:

Soil Type: Loam

Soil Moisture: Dry Mesic to Mesic Wet

Average Height: 2.5-5 ft.

Sun Exposure: Partial sun to partial shade

Habitat: Woodland edges, woodland shores

Bloom Time: July - August

Bloom Color: White to Green to Pink

*Available as plants

Pollinator Notes: Larval Host: Monarch Butterfly

***Attracts:** Bumblebees, bees, butterflies, beetles, weevils and bugs

Plant Note: Hybridizes with Common Milkweed, Ideal choice for moist partial shade

Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)



Plant Information:
Soil Type: Peat, loam
Soil Moisture: Wet
Average Height: 3-6 ft.
Sun Exposure: Full to partial sun
Habitat: Wetlands
Bloom Time: July-August
Bloom Color: Pink

*Available as plant and seed

Pollinator Notes: LARVAL HOST: Monarch Butterfly and Queen Butterfly

Primary Pollinators: Bees (Yellow-faced, Bumble, Sweat, Resin, Leafcutter) and Wasps (Great Black, Yellowjacket, Great Golden Digger, Square-headed)

Secondary Pollinators: Butterflies (Monarchs, Great Spangled Fritillary, Red Admiral, Skippers, etc.) and Moths (Clearwing Hummingbird)

***Attracts:** Hummingbirds and Honey Bees and MANY other species, including several species of beetles and flies.

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)



Plant Information:
Soil Type: Sand, Clay, Calcareous Gravel
Soil Moisture: Dry to Mesic
Average Height: 3-6 ft.
Sun Exposure: Full to partial sun
Habitat: Prairie, Savanna
Bloom Time: June to August
Bloom Color: Purple

*Available as plant and seed

Pollinator Notes: Larval Host: Monarch Butterfly

***Attracts:** Bees, butterflies, beetles and bugs.

Plant Note: Can be aggressive. Minimize seed spread by using as a cut flower (blooms are fragrant), or removing seed pods before they mature and split.

Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)



Plant Information:
Soil Type: Well-drained soils, sands
Soil Moisture: Dry to mesic
Average Height: 1-2 ft.
Sun Exposure: Full to partial sun
Habitat: Dry prairies, sandy savannas
Bloom Time: June to July
Bloom Color: Orange

*Available as plant and seed

Pollinator Notes: Larval Host: Monarch Butterfly

Also the Larval Host plant for: Queen Butterfly and Milkweed Tussock Moth

***Attracts:** Butterflies, bees, wasps, beetles, ants, hummingbirds and honey bees

Plant Note: This plant has a very long taproot, which makes it very difficult to transplant large plants

Whorled Milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)



Plant Information:

Soil Type: Sand, loam, clay

Soil Moisture: Dry to Mesic

Average Height: 1-3 ft.

Sun Exposure: Full to partial sun

Habitat: Dry prairies, rocky soils, oak savannas

Bloom Time: July - September

Bloom Color: White

*Available as plants

Pollinator Notes: Larval Host: Monarch Butterfly

Primary Pollinators: Bees and wasps

***Attracts:** Numerous species of Butterflies, bees, wasps, beetles, ants and honey bees

Plant Note: Forms rhizomes and colonizes

An IMPORTANT note on ALL milkweed species:

ALL milkweed species contains CARDIAC GLYCOSIDES which are poisonous to humans and livestock. The latex (white milky sap) is also an extreme eye irritant. NEVER ingest any part of milkweed plants, and use extreme caution when handling sap, do not get into eyes.