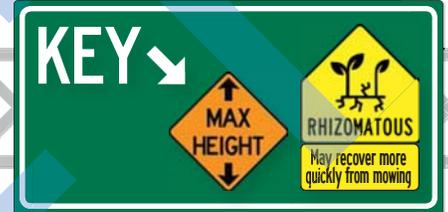




MILKWEEDS OF COLORADO



Milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) are herbaceous perennial plants named for their milky sap, and occur in a wide range of habitats, including intact natural plant communities on roadsides and highly disturbed roadsides. As required host plants for caterpillars of the monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), milkweeds play an essential role in the butterfly's life cycle (see reverse). Vegetation management that allows milkweeds to persist can support monarchs. This guide can help you recognize the most common native species found on roadsides in your region.



The Most Common Species Found in Colorado Include (in alphabetical order):

Spider milkweed (*A. asperula* ssp. *asperula*)



PLANT: Multiple spreading stems, unbranched to few branches, usually smooth. **LEAVES:** Alternate; lance-shaped, usually folded lengthwise. **HABITAT:** Prairie, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Clayey, gravelly, sandy, rocky limestone. **BLOOM:** Apr-Jun; light green with touches of purple.

Swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*)



PLANT: One to many upright branched stems, smooth or with short hairs. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped or narrow, with few short hairs. **HABITAT:** Grasslands and ditches, edges of ponds, lakes, streams. **SOILS:** Silty to loamy or clayey; wet to moist, tolerates some mesic. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; pink, light purple.

Plains milkweed (*A. pumila*)



PLANT: Upright unbranched or branched stems, with fine hairs. **LEAVES:** Alternate, may appear whorled; thin and narrow, dense on stems (bottlebrush appearance). **HABITAT:** Prairies, plains, low hills. **SOILS:** Rocky, sandy; dry. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; white to greenish white.

Showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*)



PLANT: Stout upright unbranched stems, hairy. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped, hairy. **HABITAT:** Prairies, old fields, disturbed areas edges of rivers, ponds. **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy, dry to moist. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; pink and cream or white; flowers are the largest of American species.

Most Common Milkweed Species *continued*

Horsetail milkweed (*A. subverticillata*)



PLANT: Upright branched or unbranched stems, smooth or with fine hairs. **LEAVES:** Whorled, narrow to linear, smooth. **HABITAT:** Ditches, stream edges, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Sandy, moist. **BLOOM:** May–Aug; yellow to cream or purple tinges.

Additional Resources:

- ⇒ For more information on monarchs and roadsides, visit: monarchjointventure.org/our-work/projects/roadsides-as-habitat-for-monarch-butterflies
- ⇒ Western Monarch Milkweed Mapper: www.monarchmilkweedmapper.org
- ⇒ Mowing and Monarchs: monarchjointventure.org/images/uploads/documents/MowingForMonarchs.pdf
- ⇒ Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation: xerces.org
- ⇒ Monarch Joint Venture: monarchjointventure.org

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE

1 Egg
3–5 DAYS

2 Larva
10–14 DAYS

Caterpillars grow by molting
5 INSTARS

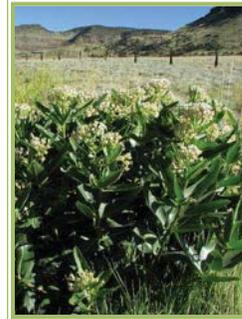
4 Adult 2–5 WEEKS (BREEDING GENERATIONS);
6–9 MONTHS (OVERWINTERING GENERATION)

3 Chrysalis
10–14 DAYS

Multiple generations of monarchs are produced over the spring and summer, with the fall generation migrating to overwintering sites. You can monitor monarchs or milkweeds; see Resources above.

Less Common Milkweed Species in the Region

Hall's milkweed (*A. hallii*)



PLANT: Upright unbranched stem or branched at base, hairy, 2' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate to opposite, narrow oval-shaped, hairy. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, gravelly soil; prairies, wash-bottoms, sagebrush, woodlands. (pinyon-juniper, cottonwood, ponderosa pine, aspen). **BLOOM:** Jun–Aug; purple, pink, cream or white with green tinges.

Broadleaf milkweed (*A. latifolia*)



PLANT: Upright unbranched stout stems, woolly when young to smooth with age, 2' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; numerous, broadly oval, woolly when young to smooth with age. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky; prairie, dry grasslands, slopes. **BLOOM:** May–Aug; white to pale green.

Butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*)



PLANT: One to many spreading to upright stems, with short hairs; lacks milky sap, 3' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate, lance-shaped, hairy underneath. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, loamy, rocky prairies, old fields, open woods. **BLOOM:** May–Sep; orange to red or yellow.

Green comet milkweed (*A. viridiflora*)



PLANT: Unbranched stems, spreading to upright, with short hairs, 3' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite, lance-shaped, with margins folded upward or wavy, short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to loamy or rocky dry to dry-mesic prairies, old fields, dunes, forests. **BLOOM:** Jun–Aug; light green to yellowish green.

Additional milkweeds in Colorado: *A. arenaria*, *A. cryptoceras*, *A. engelmanniana*, *A. involucrata*, *A. latifolia*, *A. macrotis*, *A. oenotheroides*, *A. rusbyi*, *A. uncialis*.

Maps & Distribution Data:

These profiles are derived from regional floras and field guides and Woodson's *The North American Species of Asclepias* (1954). Most common species are abundant across the states and are found in roadsides. Less common species might not occur in all states in the region, have a limited distribution across a state, or may be less common in roadsides. Additional species may be uncommon in roadsides, have a small distribution in a state or region, or are uncommon or rare in the region. The range maps indicate counties where species have been observed, and were created by USDA-NRCS using the latest data from the USDA's PLANTS database (<https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov>).

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viridiflora); Tom Potterfield / flickr (*A. incarnata*); Paul Rothrock / SEINet (*A. pumilla*); Xerces Society / Stephanie McKnight (*A. speciosa*); Andrey Zharkikh / flickr (*A. a. ssp. asperula*). Photographs remain under the copyright of the photographer. © 2019 by The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Xerces® is a trademark registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.