

# MILKWEED CARE SHEET

Milkweed (*Asclepias spp*) are sun-loving plants that are essential perennials for monarch butterflies, providing food for caterpillars and nectar for adult butterflies. Milkweed blooms from mid-summer into early fall, is dormant in the winter and re-emerges in the spring.

## FALL: TIME TO PLANT

The ideal planting time for these seedlings is mid-September to mid-November. Be intentional with the planting location. Milkweed does not like to be relocated once planted. Uprooting drastically reduces its chance of survival. Find a sunny place in the garden and dig a small, deep hole so the roots are entirely covered and the stem and leaves of the plant are above ground. Gently remove the seedling from the pot and set into the hole. Be careful not to divide or disturb the root system. Plant 1-2 feet apart to allow room for growth and in **groups of 4-6 plants to ensure enough food for caterpillars**. Lightly pack soil around your newly planted milkweed, then lightly water. Take care not to over-water plants: for the first 4 weeks after planting, water often enough for the soil around the plant to stay slightly moist. Once established, less frequent watering is needed.

## WINTER: IS IT DEAD?

Even if the milkweed is no longer visible, it's likely still alive. Milkweed goes dormant in winter, prompting monarchs to continue their migration south. This natural 'die back' allows the plant to establish its roots and stockpile resources to grow stronger in the spring. Leave the brown leaves and stem in place.

## SPRING: PRACTICE PATIENCE

Most milkweed species are late to wake in the spring. Be patient! The roots and woody crown are alive and waiting for consistently warm weather to wake up and grow. In mid-spring, remove old stems 1-2 inches above ground level to allow for new growth. Keep in mind that young milkweed may not grow much in the first season, but after a second growing season, the plants will become large and robust as they establish. It may take until the third year for milkweed to bloom.

## SUMMER: COUNT YOUR EGGS

Native milkweed, *once established*, is fairly drought tolerant and does not require frequent watering. Ensure the soil is moist, but be cautious not to over-water. As your milkweed grows bigger each year, enjoy watching visiting monarchs lay eggs and caterpillars consume entire leaves: possibly all your leaves! Milkweed is the **only** plant monarch caterpillars can eat. Soon a new generation of monarchs will take flight.

## FALL: CONGRATULATIONS!

Your milkweed has survived an entire year. Fall is the best time to do a once a year fertilization, using an organic fertilizer.

## PEST CONTROL: AVOID CHEMICALS

The most common pest on milkweed is yellow oleander aphids. Best controlled by squishing or blasting with water. Lady beetle larvae, lacewings and other insects will happily feast on aphids. To preserve these helpful predators, and the monarchs you are raising, avoid insecticides in and around your pollinator habitat. For other common milkweed insects, visit <https://wimastergardener.org/article/common-milkweed-insects/>

## MILKWEED VARIETIES



### Common Milkweed

Tolerates a wide range of soil types: gravel, mulch, clay and compost-enriched soils. Requires full to part sun, at least 4-6 hours per day. Water enough to keep soil slightly moist but not wet. Grows up to 5' tall. Flowers are pink to purplish in color.



### Orange Butterfly Milkweed

Plant in sandy or gravelly soil with a few handfuls of compost. **Do not plant into rich, highly-amended soil.** Requires full sun and infrequent, deep waterings once established. Grows up to 3' tall. Flowers are vibrant orange.



### Green Milkweed

Tolerates a wide range of soil types: gravel, mulch, clay and compost-enriched soils. Requires full to part sun, at least 4-6 hours per day. Water enough to keep soil slightly moist but not wet. Grows up to 5' tall. Flowers are pink to purplish in color.

For more resources, visit [www.thewoodlandtownship-tx.gov/environment](http://www.thewoodlandtownship-tx.gov/environment)