



Not All Milkweed is Created Equal

All monarchs need milkweed to survive, but are some milkweeds better than others?

EXCELLENT CHOICES

Native Genotypes

Milkweed species native to and originating from your ecoregion and habitat type (and grown without pesticides).

A native species varies genetically in its adaptations to the particular localities and environmental conditions under which it grows. This results in variations between populations of the same species, known as local genotypes or ecotypes. Planting local genotypes helps to preserve genetic diversity within the species and support local species which depend upon on these plants for food, shelter, etc. Also, in general, the more closely you match the environmental conditions of the source of your plant material to that of the planting site, the better the plants should grow. Seeds may be locally and sustainably collected for propagation. Local genotypes may also be available from certain reputable native nurseries.

GOOD CHOICES

Native Species

Milkweed species native to your area (and grown without pesticides).

Native is a term to describe plants endemic (indigenous) to a given area. In North America, a plant is often deemed native if it was present before colonization. Planting species native to your area helps support local species adapted to depend upon on these plants for food, shelter, etc. When local genotypes of native species are not obtainable, native milkweeds are good choices.

- Butterflyweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*
- Swamp Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*
- Clasping Milkweed, *Asclepias amplexicaulis*
- Sandhill Milkweed, *Asclepias humistrata*
- Whorled Milkweed, *Asclepias verticillata*
- Poke Milkweed, *Asclepias exaltata*

QUESTIONABLE CHOICES

Non-native Species

Milkweed species not native to your area, particularly tropical species.

Tropical milkweeds are of particular concern to many monarch researchers because they can grow year-round in warm areas and lead to monarchs breeding during the winter -- a behavior that dramatically increases monarchs' risk for infectious disease (caused by *Oe* parasites). It is advised that gardeners in the South who choose to grow tropical species cut it back to six inches and remove leaves each month during November through February to discourage monarch winter-breeding.

- Mexican Milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*
- Balloon Plant, *Gomphocarpus physocarpus*
(Also known as *Gomphocarpus brasiliensis*, *Asclepias brasiliensis*, or *Asclepias physocarpa*)

AVOID AT ALL COSTS

Pesticide-treated Milkweeds

Milkweed species grown using pesticides, particularly systemic insecticides.

Simply put, insecticides kill monarchs. Pesticides are frequently used in the horticultural industry to produce healthy-looking plants. Especially dangerous are systemic insecticides that persist in plant tissues, killing caterpillars and preventing butterfly eggs from hatching.

Systemic insecticides are present in many brand-name products, so check the ingredient list for the following:

- Acetamiprid
- Imidacloprid
- Clothianidin
- Dinotefuran
- Thiamethoxam

“It is usually better to err on the side of safety, and whenever possible, native species growing in their normal places at the normal times are likely to be safest.”