

MILKWEEDS OF ARIZONA & NEW MEXICO



Milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) are herbaceous perennial plants named for their milky sap. These plants occur in a wide range of habitats, including intact natural communities on roadsides and highly disturbed roadsides. As required host plants for monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) caterpillars, 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 milkweeds in roadsides in Arizona & New Mexico (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:** Upland grasslands, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Sandy to clayey, gravelly and rocky limestone; dry. **BLOOM:** Apr–Jun (may have a second later bloom with rains); light green with touches of purple.

Desert milkweed (*A. erosa*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched to branched stout stems; with fine hairs; grows in clumps. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval- to lance-shaped; smooth or with fine hairs. **HABITAT:** Washes, gulches, canyons, disturbed areas in deserts, creosote bush and sagebrush communities. **SOILS:** Sandy; dry. **BLOOM:** Apr–Oct; yellowish or cream; flower buds hairy.

Showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*)



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

Rush milkweed (*A. subulata*)



PLANT: Shrub growth form with multiple unbranched to branched stems from the base; smooth; mostly leafless. **LEAVES:** Opposite; narrow to linear; emerging after rains. **HABITAT:** Slopes, mesas, plains, desert washes. **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky; dry. **BLOOM:** Apr–Oct; whitish green with yellow.

Most common milkweed species *continued*

Horsetail milkweed (*A. subverticillata*)



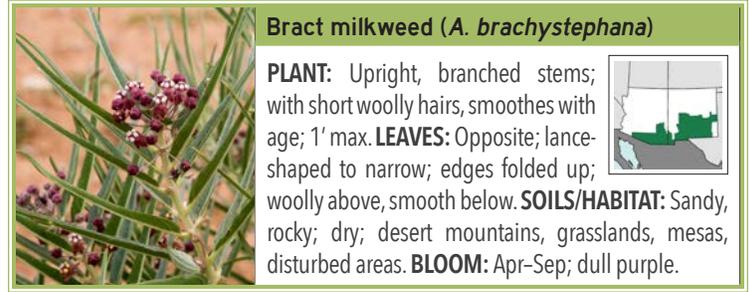
PLANT: Upright, branched or unbranched stems; smooth or with fine hairs. **LEAVES:** Whorled; narrow to linear; smooth. **HABITAT:** Disturbed areas, ditches, streams. **SOILS:** Sandy; moist. **BLOOM:** Jul-Aug; yellow to cream or purple.

Additional Resources:

- ⇒ For more information on monarchs and roadsides, including monitoring, visit: tinyurl.com/MJV-Monarchs-Roadsides
- ⇒ Western Monarch Milkweed Mapper: www.monarchmilkweedmapper.org
- ⇒ Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation: xerces.org
- ⇒ Monarch Joint Venture: monarchjointventure.org

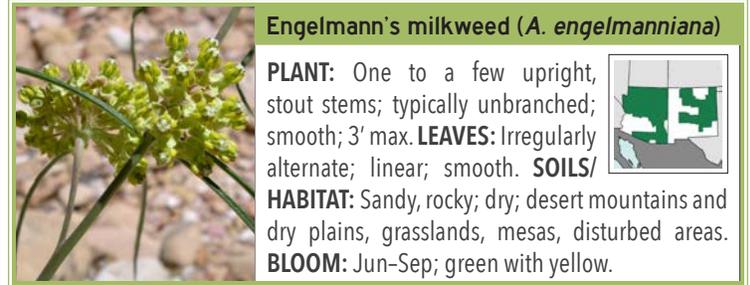
Less common roadside milkweeds:

Bract milkweed (*A. brachystephana*)



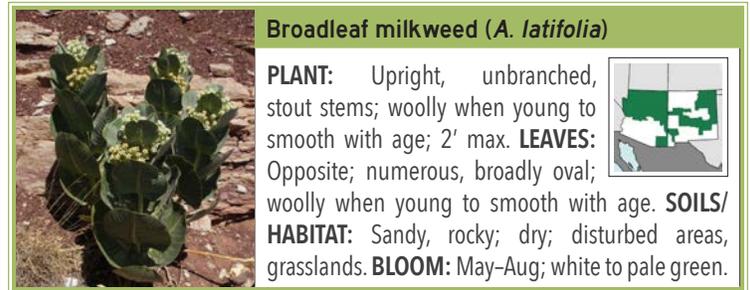
PLANT: Upright, branched stems; with short woolly hairs, smooths with age; 1' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped to narrow; edges folded up; woolly above, smooth below. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky; dry; desert mountains, grasslands, mesas, disturbed areas. **BLOOM:** Apr-Sep; dull purple.

Engelmann's milkweed (*A. engelmanniana*)



PLANT: One to a few upright, stout stems; typically unbranched; smooth; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Irregularly alternate; linear; smooth. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky; dry; desert mountains and dry plains, grasslands, mesas, disturbed areas. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; green with yellow.

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; dry; disturbed areas, grasslands. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; white to pale green.

Pineneedle milkweed (*A. linaria*)



PLANT: Shrub-like; upright stems with multiple branches; with fine hairs; 5' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate or appearing whorled; narrow, needle-like. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Rocky; dry; slopes, mesas. **BLOOM:** Feb-Nov; white to greenish with pink or purple.

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE

1 Egg
3-5 DAYS

2 Larva
10-14 DAYS

Caterpillar grows 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 Additional Resources above.

Additional milkweeds in Arizona and/or New Mexico: *Asclepias albicans*, *A. angustifolia*, *A. arenaria*, *A. cryptoceras*, *A. cutleri*, *A. emoryi*, *A. glaucescens*, *A. hallii*, *A. hypoleuca*, *A. incarnata*, *A. involucrata*, *A. lemmonii*, *A. macrosperma*, *A. macrotis*, *A. nummularia*, *A. nyctaginifolia*, *A. oenotheroides*, *A. pumila*, *A. quinqueidentata*, *A. rusbyi*, *A. ruthiae*, *A. scaposa*, *A. tuberosa*, *A. uncialis*, *A. verticillata*, *A. viridiflora*, *A. welshii*.

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 both states and are found in roadsides. Less common species might not occur in both states, 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 are uncommon or rare. The range maps indicate counties where species have been observed (but may be incomplete), 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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PHOTO CREDITS: Patrick Alexander / SEINet (*A. subulata*, *A. brachystephana*); Frankie Coburn / SEINet (*A. linaria*); Max Licher / SEINet (*A. subverticillata*, *A. engelmanniana*, *A. latifolia*); Xerces Society / Stephanie McKnight (*A. erosa*, *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.