



MILKWEEDS OF FLORIDA



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.

KEY

↑
MAX
HEIGHT
↓

RHIZOMATOUS
MAY BE MORE
TOLERANT OF MOWING

The most common milkweeds in roadsides in Florida (in alphabetical order):

Pinewoods milkweed (*A. humistrata*)



PLANT: One to multiple sprawling stems; usually smooth. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; bases that clasp stem; purple veins; usually smooth. **HABITAT:** Pastures, open woods, sandhills, scrubland. **SOILS:** Sandy; dry. **BLOOM:** Mar-Jun; pink to white flowers.

Fewflower milkweed (*A. lanceolata*)



PLANT: Slender unbranched stems; smooth; with few leaves or flowers. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped or narrow; smooth. **HABITAT:** Moist grasslands and ditches, edges of ponds, lakes, streams. **SOILS:** Sandy or loamy; moist; ditches, marshes, wet pine savannas, wet prairies. **BLOOM:** May - Aug; red and orange.

Aquatic milkweed (*A. perennis*)



PLANT: One to six upright stems branching from base; dark green and hairless. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance- to oval-shaped; often green all winter. **HABITAT:** Wet areas, ditches, streams, swamps. **SOILS:** Wetland soils. **BLOOM:** May-Nov; white flowers (with pink when in bud).

Tuba milkweed (*A. tomentosa*)



PLANT: One or two upright, unbranched stems. **LEAVES:** Opposite; elliptic; with wavy margins and velvet-like hairs. **HABITAT:** Sand dunes, pine sandhills. **SOILS:** Very well-drained sands. **BLOOM:** May-Jun; pale yellowish green.

Most common milkweed species *continued*

Butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*)



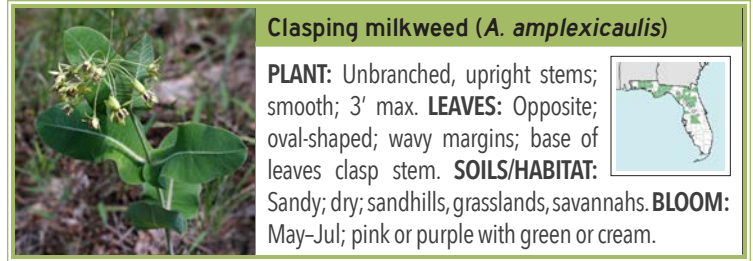
PLANT: One to many spreading to upright stems; with short hairs; lacks milky sap. **LEAVES:** Alternate; lance-shaped; hairy underneath. **HABITAT:** Sandhills, scrub, old fields. **SOILS:** Sandy, loamy, rocky; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; orange to red or yellow.

Additional Resources:

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

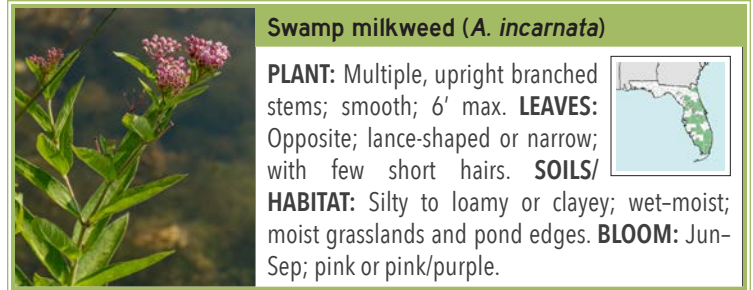
Less common roadside milkweeds:

Clasping milkweed (*A. amplexicaulis*)



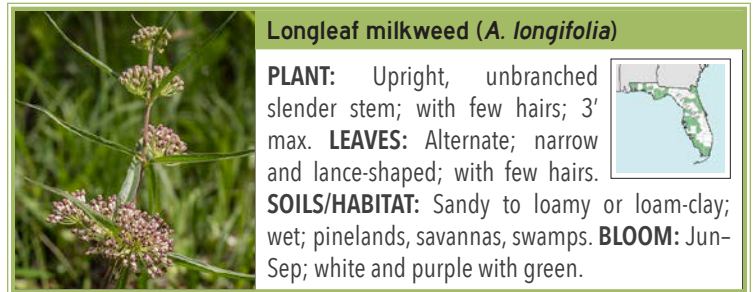
PLANT: Unbranched, upright stems; smooth; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; wavy margins; base of leaves clasp stem. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy; dry; sandhills, grasslands, savannas. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; pink or purple with green or cream.

Swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*)



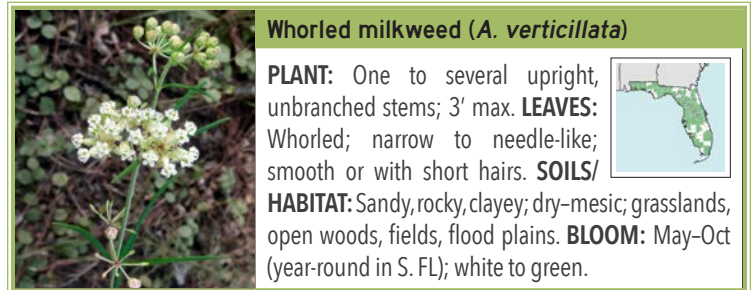
PLANT: Multiple, upright branched stems; smooth; 6' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped or narrow; with few short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Silty to loamy or clayey; wet-moist; moist grasslands and pond edges. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; pink or pink/purple.

Longleaf milkweed (*A. longifolia*)



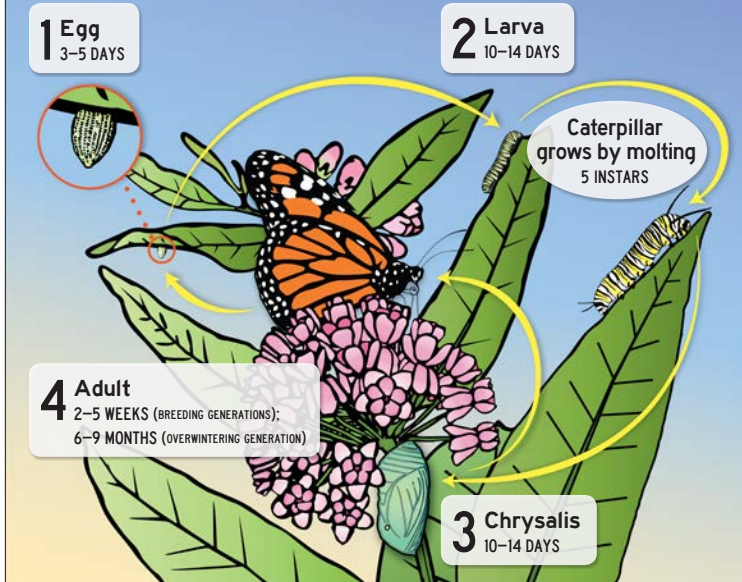
PLANT: Upright, unbranched slender stem; with few hairs; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate; narrow and lance-shaped; with few hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to loamy or loam-clay; wet; pinelands, savannas, swamps. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; white and purple with green.

Whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*)



PLANT: One to several upright, unbranched stems; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Whorled; narrow to needle-like; smooth or with short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky, clayey; dry-mesic; grasslands, open woods, fields, flood plains. **BLOOM:** May-Oct (year-round in S. FL); white to green.

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE



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 Florida: *Asclepias cinerea*, *A. connivens*, *A. curtissii*, *A. feayi*, *A. michauxii*, *A. obovata*, *A. pedicillata*, *A. rubra*, *A. variegata*, *A. viridiflora*, *A. viridis*, *A. viridula*. **NOTE:** Tropical milkweed (*A. curassavica*) is non-native species frequently sold in Florida nurseries that can escape and invade native ecosystems, particularly south of Orlando. Monarch caterpillars feed on this plant, but it has been implicated in higher rates of diseased monarchs.

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 state and are found in roadsides. Less common species might have a limited distribution across the state or may be less common in roadsides. Additional species may be uncommon in roadsides, have a small distribution in the 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>).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Written by Ray Moranz, Jennifer Hopwood, Nancy Lee Adamson, Stephanie Frischie and (Xerces Society), and Alison Cariveau (Monarch Joint Venture). Reviewed by Scott Davis (USFWS), Jaret Daniels (University of Florida), and Mark Garland (NRCS). Design, header, and monarch life cycle by Sara Morris (Xerces Society). This work was conducted in the National Cooperative Highway Research Program, which is administered by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. **PHOTO CREDITS:** Patrick Coin /

flickr (*A. humistrata*); Eleanor Dietrich / flickr (*A. lanceolata* [right], *A. tomentosa*, *A. verticillata*); Jerry Oldenettel / flickr (*A. verticillata*); Jim Fowler (*A. longifolia*, *A. lanceolata* [left]); Mary Keim / flickr (*A. perennis*); Tom Potterfield / flickr (*A. incarnata*); Paul Rothrock / SEINet (*A. amplexicaulis*); Scott Seigfried (*A. tuberosa*). 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.