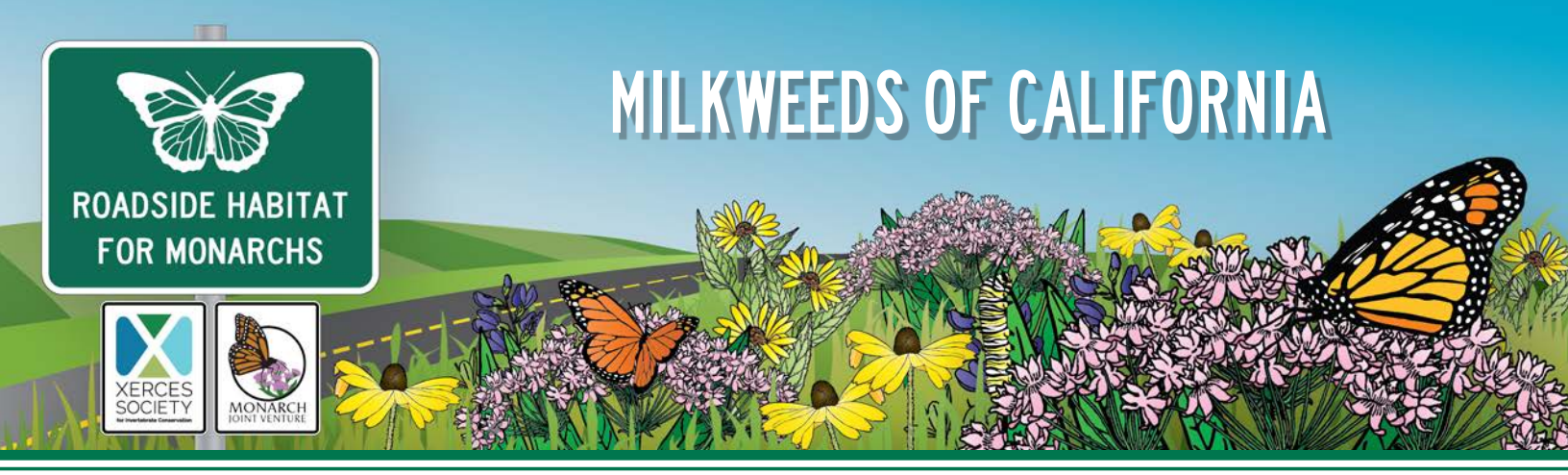
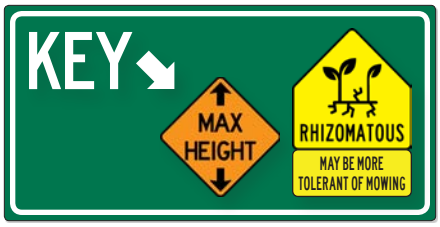


MILKWEEDS OF CALIFORNIA

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.

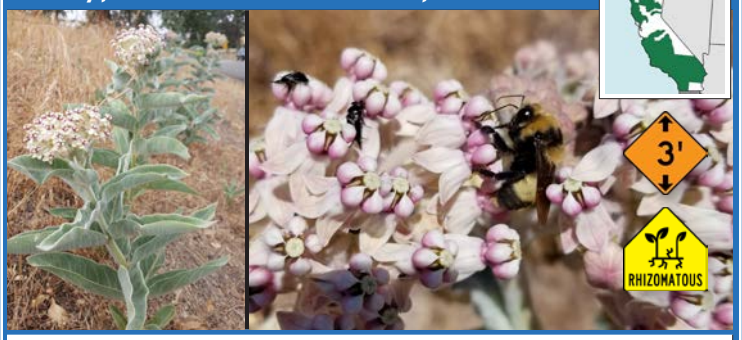


The most common milkweeds in roadsides in California (in alphabetical order):

Heartleaf milkweed (*A. cordifolia*)

PLANT: Spreading to upright stout stems; mostly hairless. **LEAVES:** Opposite; heart- to lance-shaped; with waxy coating. **HABITAT:** Slopes and hillsides in foothill woodland, chaparral, and evergreen forest. **SOILS:** Rocky, gravelly; dry. **BLOOM:** Apr–Jul; red-purple to violet with pink or white tinges.

Woollypod milkweed (*A. eriocarpa*)



PLANT: Upright, usually unbranched stems; densely hairy but may be less so with age. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance- to oval-shaped; may be wavy at edges; hairy but may be less so with age. **HABITAT:** Valley grassland, chaparral, foothill woodland, stream banks, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Rocky; dry. **BLOOM:** May–Oct; cream or yellow with white or tinges of purple or pink.

Desert milkweed (*A. erosa*)

PLANT: Upright, unbranched to branched stout stems; with fine hairs; grows in clumps. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval- to lance-shaped; smooth to 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.

Narrowleaf milkweed (*A. fascicularis*)

PLANT: Thin, upright branched stems; smooth. **LEAVES:** Opposite to whorled; narrow to lance-shaped; pointed and folded lengthwise; mostly smooth. **HABITAT:** Valley grasslands, wetland-riparian areas, open woodlands, chaparral, sagebrush, disturbed areas, banks of streams and irrigation ditches, fallow fields. **SOILS:** Sandy to clayey; dry–moist. **BLOOM:** May–Oct; dusky pink to rose with touches of white.

(Continued on next page.)

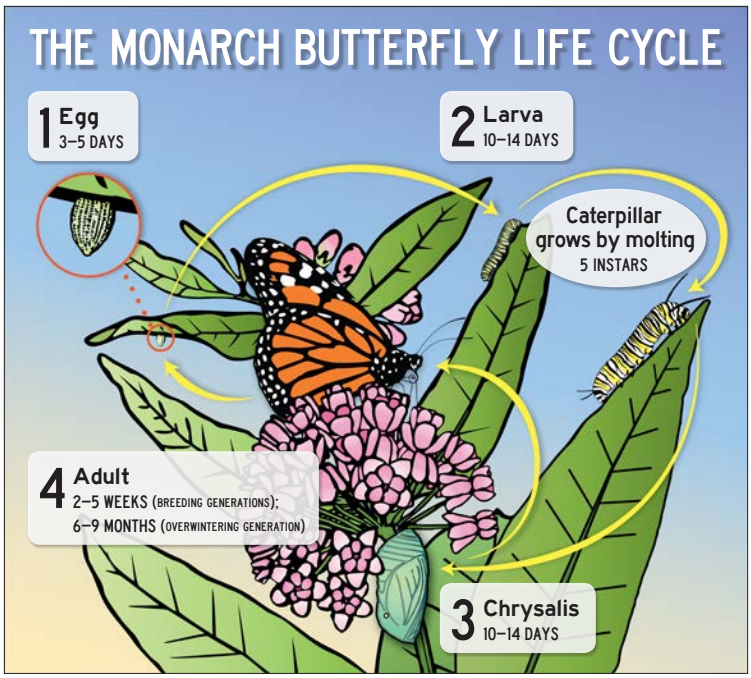
Most common milkweed species *continued*

Showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*)

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

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



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.

Less common roadside milkweeds:

Whitestem milkweed (*A. albicans*)

PLANT: Shrub growth form with wand-like stems branching at tip; smooth and waxy; 10′ max. **LEAVES:** Opposite or in whorls of three; narrow to linear; shed during drought. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Rocky; dry; deserts, creosote bush scrub. **BLOOM:** Mar–Apr; yellow to white.

California milkweed (*A. californica*)

PLANT: Multiple spreading to upright stems; grow in clumps; very woolly; 3′ max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; densely hairy. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sand to clay; dry; valley grasslands, yellow pine and pinyon-juniper woods, chaparral. **BLOOM:** Apr–Jul; pink to purple; buds hairy; flowers nodding.

Rush milkweed (*A. subulata*)

PLANT: Shrub growth form; multiple unbranched to branched stems from the base; smooth; mostly leafless; 5′ max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; narrow to linear; emerging after rains. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky; dry; slopes, mesas, plains, desert washes. **BLOOM:** Apr–Oct; whitish green with yellow.

Woolly milkweed (*A. vestita*)

PLANT: Stout, upright stems clustered at the base; densely hairy; 2′ max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval- to lance-shaped; densely hairy. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy; dry; valley grassland, chaparral, foothill woodland, hillsides, canyons. **BLOOM:** Apr–Jul; yellow or pale green with white.

Additional milkweeds in California: *Asclepias asperula, A. cryptoceras, A. fruticosa, A. latifolia, A. linaria, A. nyctaginifolia, A. solanoana.*

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).

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PHOTO CREDITS: Frankie Coburn / SEINet (*A. albicans*); Professor Stephen Lynch (*A. vestita*); Xerces Society / Brianna Borders (*A. subulata*); Xerces Society / Stephanie McKnight (*A. cordifolia, A eriocarpa, A. erosa, A. fascicularis, A. speciosa*); Jordan Zylstra / Calphotos (*A. californica*). Photographs remain under the copyright of the photographer.

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