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Milkweed Species of Canada Guide

A guide to the distribution of milkweed species across Canada that provide important food and habitat for monarchs.

Milkweed, a flowering plant of the genus *Asclepias*, is essential to monarch (*Danus plexippus*) survival. It is recognizable by its green, white, pink or orange uniquely crown-shaped flowers and oval seed pods. There are 14 species of milkweed found throughout Canada, in all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador and the territories. Milkweed grows in a variety of habitats including open fields, prairies, forests, shorelines, and even rocky and sandy regions. Some species thrive along roadways as well. Most milkweed species are currently classified as uncommon or rare. This is the result of decades of weed-control bylaws that targeted them as noxious/invasive and didn't differentiate between species. Milkweed is beginning to make a comeback now, but the impacts linger.

Milkweed is the only plant that monarchs will eat as caterpillars. It is also a host to monarch eggs and a nectar source. Due to its significance for monarchs, some milkweeds make great additions to Rights-of-Way (ROW) project seed mixes. Note that some of these species are regionally rare, and not all species mentioned will be readily available as seeds. If you are planning a meadow habitat project in southern Ontario, refer to our ROW seed calculator to see what species and amount of milkweed might make a good mix for your site conditions and region.

1



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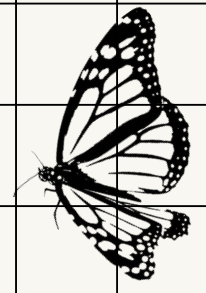
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Milkweed Species of Canada

PHOTO	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE
1	<i>Asclepias exaltata</i>	Poke Milkweed					rare	extirpated			
2	<i>Asclepias hirtella</i> **	Tall Green Milkweed					rare				
3	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Swamp Milkweed				uncommon	common	common	uncommon	uncommon	uncommon
4	<i>Asclepias lanuginosa</i> **	Woolly Milkweed				rare					
5	<i>Asclepias ovalifolia</i>	Oval-leaved Milkweed		uncommon	uncommon	uncommon	rare				
6	<i>Asclepias purpurascens</i>	Purple Milkweed					rare				
7	<i>Asclepias quadrifolia</i> *	Four-leaved Milkweed					rare				
8	<i>Asclepias speciosa</i>	Showy Milkweed	uncommon	uncommon	uncommon	uncommon					



none
 extirpated
 rare
 uncommon
 common

*Population unknown





Milkweed Species of Canada





PHOTO	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE
9	<i>Asclepias sullivantii</i>	Prairie Milkweed					diagonal lines				
10	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i> *	Common Milkweed			diagonal lines	solid purple	dots	diagonal lines	diagonal lines	diagonal lines	diagonal lines
11	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> **	Butterfly Weed					solid purple	diagonal lines			
12	<i>Asclepias verticillata</i> **	Whorled Milkweed			diagonal lines	solid purple	diagonal lines				
13	<i>Asclepias virdiflora</i> **	Short Green Milkweed		diagonal lines	diagonal lines	solid purple	diagonal lines				

none
 extirpated
 rare
 uncommon
 common

*This is the preferred species of monarch butterflies
 ** only found in specific regions



1. Canada, E. and C. C. (2019, August 29). Government of Canada. Canada.ca. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-education-centre/fact-sheets/monarch-butterfly.html>
2. DLovett, J. (n.d.). Status, Distribution, and Potential Impact from Noxious Weed Legislation. Monarch Watch. Retrieved from <https://monarchwatch.org/read/articles/canweed2.htm>
3. Royal Botanical Gardens. (2020, September 14). Growing milkweed in Ontario. Royal Botanical Gardens. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www.rbg.ca/growing-milkweed-in-ontario/>
4. Canadian Wildlife Federation. <https://cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/encyclopedias/flora/milkweed.html>

 **Did you know?** 

Milkweeds are named for their milky latex, which contains cardiac glycoside. This toxin is not only tolerated by monarchs but is actually incorporated as a toxin for predation protection!