Common name: **Butterfly milkweed** Genus Species: ***Asclepias tuberosa***

Dave Powell, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Description: Butterfly milkweed is a perennial, herbaceous plant with multiple stems, growing 1 to 3 feet tall. Its small, orange to red, and sometimes yellow, flowers are grouped into showy clusters. Each flower has both male and female parts.

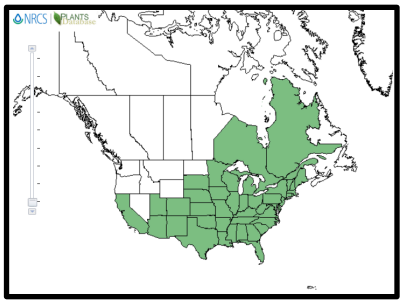
Habitats: Butterfly milkweed grows in sandy, loamy, or rocky limestone soils of prairies, open woodlands, roadsides, and disturbed areas along roadsides, abandoned farmlands, and other open areas.

Phenology highlight: Look for monarch butterfly adults, chrysalises, and caterpillars on this and other milkweed species.

Species facts

- Butterfly milkweed is pollinated by a variety of insects, including bees, wasps, monarch butterflies and other butterfly species.
- The monarch butterfly lifecycle requires milkweed because they lay their eggs only on milkweeds, including butterfly milkweed.
- The roots of butterfly milkweed were used extensively by Native American and Euro-Americans for medicines, especially for lung related ailments.
- Milkweeds may be toxic, however, when taken internally without sufficient preparation.

Wendy VanDyk Evans, Bugwood.org



Why observe this species? Butterfly milkweed is a USA-NPN regional plant species. Regional species are ecologically or economically important and are distributed more locally than calibration species. The NPN integrates these observations to better understand plant responses within the different geographic regions of the nation.

Tip for observing this species: Even when completely empty seed pods remain on the plant well into winter, record "No" for all fruit phenophases.

Map credit: USDA, NRCS. 2014. The PLANTS Database http://plants.usda.gov, 20 December 2015). National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA

For more information about phenology and the New York Phenology Project (NYPP), please visit the NYPP website (www.nyphenologyproject.org) and the USA-NPN website (www.usanpn.org).

Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

***Note**: flower and fruit phenophases are nested so you may need to record more than one phenophase in each group; for example, if you record **Y** for "open flowers" you should also record **Y** for "flowers or flower buds."*

Initial growth New growth is visible after a period of no growth as new shoots breaking through the soil surface. For seedlings, initial growth includes the two small elongated leaves (cotyledons) before the first true leaf unfolds.

Leaves One or more live, fully unfolded leaves are visible. For seedlings, consider only true leaves, not the two small leaves (cotyledons) found on the stem immediately after the seedling emerges. Do not include fully dried or dead leaves.

Flowers or flower buds One or more fresh open or unopened flowers or flower buds are visible on the plant. Include flower buds that are still developing, but do not include wilted or dried flowers.

Open flowers One or more open, fresh flowers are visible. Flowers are open when the reproductive parts (male stamens or female pistils) are visible between unfolded flower parts. Do not include wilted or dried flowers.

Fruits One or more fruits are visible on the plant. Butterfly milkweed fruit is large and pod-like and changes from green to tan or brown and splits open to expose seeds with fluff. Do not include empty fruits that have dropped all their seeds.

Ripe Fruits One or more ripe fruits are visible on the plant. Butterfly milkweed fruit is ripe when it has turned tan or brown and split open to expose seeds with fluff. Do not include empty fruits that have dropped all of their seeds.

Recent fruit or seed drop One or more mature fruits or seeds have dropped or been removed from the plant since your last visit. Do not include immature fruits that fell before ripening or empty pods.

Toxic defense Milkweeds contain toxic bitter-tasting cardiac glycosides that accumulate in the monarch caterpillars that eat the leaves. This useful chemical defense makes the flesh of caterpillars distasteful to most predators.

All phenophases pictured here

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