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 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.

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**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

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**The Monarch Butterfly Life Cycle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egg</td>
<td>3–5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larva</td>
<td>10–14 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caterpillar grows by molting 5 instars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>2–5 weeks (breeding generation); 6–9 months (overwintering generation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysalis</td>
<td>10–14 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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**Less common roadside milkweeds:**

- **Clasping milkweed (A. amplexicaulis)**
  - **PLANT:** Unbranched, upright stems; smooth; 3’ max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; wavy margins; base of leaves clasping stem. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy; dry; sandhills, grasslands, savannahs. **BLOOM:** May–Jul; pink or purple with green or cream.

- **Swamp milkweed (A. incarnata)**
  - **PLANT:** Multiple, upright branched stems; with short hairs; lacks milky sap. **LEAVES:** Alternate; lance-shaped or narrow; with few short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Silty to loamy or loam-clay; 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.

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).

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