

# Common Milkweed

## *Asclepias syriaca*

(ass-KLE-pee-us seer-ee-AK-uh)



**Left:** in bloom  
**Center:** seedpod with silk, early fall  
**Below:** Monarch Butterfly egg, on leaf underside, enlarged, approx 1/32" in diameter



Photo by and grown by John Brandauer

**Description:** Not for a formal garden, the adventurous rhizomes will astound you with their ability to pop up, seemingly anywhere. The taproot can purportedly go down ten feet! If you have a wild side, or a wild area, consider this plant, but be forewarned. This is the “weed” that made me a wildlife gardener. Consider Purple Milkweed, Swamp Milkweed or Butterfly weed for your more formal garden. All are Monarch hosts, nectar sources, and NJ native and better behaved in a garden.

**Other Names:** Butterfly flower, Common Silkweed, Silkweed, Silky Swallow-wort, Virginia Silkweed

**Type:** Forb/herb

**Family:** Asclepiadaceae

**Life Cycle:** Perennial

**NJ Native Status:** Yes, VERY widespread, in the US

**Light Requirements:** Full sun

**Soil Preference:** Prefers well-drained sandy loam, so do I. It will grow in almost ANY soil. So will I.

**Care:** None required. It is a survivor.

**Growth Rate:** **AGGRESSIVE**, rhizomatous, DEEP taproot

**Blooms:** Pinkish lavender, fragrant showy blooms in summer

**Size:** Two to four feet tall, on occasion taller, about a foot and a half wide wide.

**Natural habitat:** Well, it is a weed, so: field's gone fallow, open woods, roadsides, RR right of way, and our backyard. Can form dense clumps, does not for us.

**Wildlife Benefits:** A monarch host plant and a nectar source for bees and butterflies. Each milkweed plant is a small community, with Monarch caterpillars, aphids, Tussock moths, Milkweed Beetles, Ladybugs, spiders and more. Time spent studying the insect life cycles might be time well spent.

**Propagation Methods:** Dormant root division or seed. Collect pods in late August, early September. Stratify seeds at 40°F for one-month minimum, surface sow in spring.

**Commercial availability:** Not readily available

Information compiled from the web, supplemented by our experiences.

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