

Fewflower milkweed

(*Asclepias lanceolata*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Fewflower milkweed is a delicate perennial wildflower found in swamps and moist to wet pinelands and prairies throughout Florida. Its stunning orange to red flowers typically bloom late spring through fall.

Flowers are born in terminal umbels. Each flower bears a five-lobed calyx and five-lobed corolla. Corolla lobes are reflexed. Often mistaken for petals are five hoods (or petaloid appendages) that form an upright corona — a characteristic typical of milkweed flowers. Leaves are long (4–8 inches), linear to lanceolate, with short petioles. They are oppositely arranged. Stems are slender and smooth. Seeds are born in erect follicles that dry and split open as the fruit matures. Each seed is attached to a white silky pappus that catches the wind and aids in dispersal.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich

The genus *Asclepias* is named for Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. The species epithet *lanceolata* refers to the lanceolate or lance-shaped leaves.

Like all members of the *Asclepias* genus, Fewflower milkweed is a larval host plant for Monarch and Queen butterflies. The plant contains a milky latex that is toxic to most animals, but Monarch and Queen caterpillars are adapted to feed on them despite the chemical defense. The flowers are also an important nectar source for bees and wasps.

Family: Apocynaceae (Dogbane family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

To see where natural populations of Fewflower milkweed have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 7–10

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to wet sandy or calcareous soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: 2–3' tall

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: Fewflower milkweed is best suited for moist to wet landscapes that are seasonally inundated.

Plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.plantrealflorida.org to find a nursery in your area.