

Velvetleaf milkweed

(*Asclepias tomentosa*)

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

Velvetleaf milkweed is a robust wildflower found in sandy upland habitats across the Southeastern Coastal Plain. Like many of Florida's milkweeds, it is winter dormant, emerging in spring and blooming through the summer.

Stiff pubescent stems grow relatively straight and upwards. They are adorned with oppositely arranged ovate undulate leaves. The common name Velvetleaf refers to the texture of the leaves, which are densely covered in hairs. Pale green flowers are born in terminal umbels. The individual flowers have reflexed corollas and an upright corona.

The genus *Asclepias* is named for Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. The species epithet *tomentosa* comes from the Latin *tomentum*, meaning "covered with dense, short hairs," and refers to the texture of the plant's leaves.

Like all members of the *Asclepias* genus, Velvetleaf milkweed is a larval host plant for Monarch, Queen and Soldier butterflies. The plant contains a milky latex that is toxic to most animals, but Monarch, Queen and Soldier caterpillars are adapted to feed on them despite the chemical defense.

Family: Apocynaceae (Dogbane family)

Native range: From Liberty county east and throughout the peninsula but absent from southeast Florida

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

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Sand

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: up to 3 feet

Velvetleaf milkweed is not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see it.



Photo by Emily Bell