



Pink milkweed

*Asclepias* species produce showy flowers in a variety of colors. They are excellent for attracting butterflies and other pollinating insects. They are a must for Monarch butterflies, as they are the Monarch's primary host plant.

Florida has 21 native *Asclepias* species, most of which are perennials. Six are available commercially, most commonly Butterflyweed (*A. tuberosa* subsp. *rolfsii*), Pink milkweed (*A. incarnata*) and White milkweed (*A. perennis*).

Butterflyweed is the most widely recognized native milkweed. It occurs in sandy uplands and is good for dry landscapes. Pink milkweed is a striking species and makes an excellent addition to moist, sunny landscapes. White milkweed is also good for moist to wet spots.

## Description

*Asclepias* flowers consist of petals that reflex backward and an upright crown (corona) of crested hoods that are often mistaken for petals.

Butterflyweed is the most widely recognized of the native milkweeds. It produces showy clusters of bright reddish-orange flowers and has coarse



Phaon crescent butterfly on Butterflyweed

oval- to lance-shaped leaves. Its peak bloom time is late spring through late fall. Butterflyweed lacks the milky sap of most milkweeds. The Florida subspecies tends to be less bushy than its northern counterpart.

Pink milkweed flowers range in color from light pink to rose. Its leaves are lance- to linear-shaped and up to 6 inches long.

White milkweed produces white to pale pink flowers. It is a shorter, more delicate species of milkweed. Its leaves are lance-shaped and bright green. It produces smaller flowerheads than the others.

## Butterflies and bees

Milkweed is the larval host plant for Monarch, Queen and Soldier butterflies and is an important nectar source for these and other butterflies, including Pipevine, Spicebush and Eastern swallowtails.

Native sweat bees, leafcutter bees and yellow-faced bees forage the flowers for pollen and nectar.

## Planting

Milkweed works best in mixed butterfly and wildflower gardens. In the landscape, space plants 2 to 3 feet apart in clusters of three or more plants.

## Seeds

The small, flat seeds are born in pods that split to release seeds. Attached to each seed are silky white filaments that aid in wind dispersal. Seeds may be collected from plants once pods split. Native ecotype milkweed seeds are generally not commercially available.

Seeds can be stored in the refrigerator for a couple of months. Plant seeds by barely covering them with soil. Seedlings should be potted and allowed to grow to 3 inches before transplanting.

## Plants

Milkweeds are typically available in 4-inch, 6-inch and gallon pots.

## Care

Most milkweeds require light annual pruning to remove dead stems.

## Site conditions

Butterflyweed is best suited for dry to slightly moist well-drained soils in full sun. Pink and White milkweeds require moist to wet soils, and do well along pond edges or similar sites. They can tolerate short periods of drought once established, but soil should be kept moist to wet in summer. Pink milkweed does best in full sun but may adjust to partial shade. White milkweed can tolerate more shade. Both do well in pots.

## Hardiness zones

Butterflyweed and Pink milkweed are best suited for zones 8A–10B; White milkweed does best in zones 8A–9B.



Queen butterfly on White milkweed

Do not confuse these plants with their non-native relative, Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*), which is typically sold at big box retail garden centers. *A. curassavica*, which does not die back in winter in Florida as do native milkweeds, can encourage overwintering in adult Monarch butterflies and is linked to the transmission of *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE) infection. Inquire about species to ensure you are purchasing a native, or visit a nursery that specializes in native plants. When purchasing milkweed plants or seeds, look for and request local ecotypes propagated from responsibly collected seeds.

**CAUTION**