Alameda County Milkweed Planting Guide

Caterpillar eating milkweed leaf
Photo: Becky Hansis O'Neill

Why is milkweed important?

Monarch butterflies in the West have declined by 99% over the past 20 years. Milkweed is the butterfly's host plant- the only species they lay their eggs on. Monarch caterpillars eat the leaves which make them un-palatable to predators. The toxins in milkweed have not been shown to be harmful to cattle in small quantities, therefore milkweed can be planted on rangelands to help revive the imperiled monarch population.

Milkweed Species in Alameda County

California Milkweed
Photo: Hillary Sardinas

California Milkweed (*Asclepias californica)*

Bloom Time: April to July (early blooming)

Habitat: Rocky outcrops and grassy openings in oak woodlands.

How to ID: Thick, woolly stems; magenta-pink flowers; up to 100 cm tall. Lays prostrate (flat) when in seed.

Narrow Leaf Milkweed
Photo: Robert Perry

Narrow Leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*)

Bloom Time: May to October (late blooming)

Habitat: Variable; Occurs in dry grasslands, drainages, and seeps.

How to ID: Long , narrow pointed leaves; white-pink flowers; 50 to 100 cm tall.

Showy Milkweed
Photo: Jay Chamberlain

Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa)*

Bloom Time: June to July (late blooming)

Habitat: Grassy openings in chaparral.

How to ID: Velvety or hairy stem; large, pale pink flowers; 45 to 200 cm tall.

For more information on how locate milkweed seed, visit The Xerces Society's Milkweed Seed Finder at: https://www.xerces.org/milkweed/milkweed-seed-finder.

Tropical Milkweed
Photo: Justin Lebar

Achillea millefolium
Photo: Diane Etchison

Baccharis pilularis
Photo: Talila Golan

Grindelia hirsutula
Photo: Laura Moon

Milkweed on rangeland
Photo: Nancy Mueller

AVOID TROPICAL MILKWEED

Tropical milkweed is not native to California and unlike native milkweed species, it does not die back in winter. This means that diseases harmful to monarch butterflies, like the parasite OE, can persist on its evergreen leaves infecting future monarch generations. Tropical milkweed can also confuse monarch butterflies into breeding during time periods when they should be overwintering.

Nectar Plants for Monarchs

Monarch butterflies need nectar to fuel their migration. Add these flowering plants to your land to support monarchs:

- *Achillea millefolium*—yarrow
- *Agastache urticifolia*—horse mint
- *Arctostaphylos sp.*—manzanita
- *Baccharis pilularis*—coyote brush
- *Baccharis salicifolia*– mule fat
- *Ceanothus sp.*– CA lilac
- *Grindelia sp.*—gumplant
- *Helianthus sp.*—sunflower
- *Heteromeles arbutifolia*– toyon
- *Monardella sp.*– coyote mint
- *Salix sp.*—willow
- *Salvia sp.*– sage
- *Solidago sp.*– goldenrod
- *Verbena lasiostachys*– vervain

Interested in planting milkweed?

The Alameda County Conservation Partnership has grant funds and EQIP cost-share available to assist with planting milkweed on rangeland.

For more information, contact us:

Alameda County Resource Conservation District

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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