

# milk • weed

any of numerous plants of the genus *Asclepias* having milky juice and pods that split open releasing seeds with downy tufts. In North America, there are approximately 110 species, each known for their milky sap or latex contained in the leaves.



## Milkweeds are not just another native plant.

- Monarch Butterflies, Milkweed Bugs, and Milkweed Leaf Beetles only eat milkweed and could not survive without it.
- Honey bees and other nectar seeking insects seek milkweed nectar as their key food source.
- Hummingbirds use the seed pod floss to line their nests.



## What you need to know about Milkweed

- Milkweed plants bloom from June to August.
- Common milkweed can grow to an incredible six (6) feet tall.
- Milkweed is a perennial, meaning it will grow year after year if not disturbed (i.e. mowed, uprooted, sprayed with pesticides)
- There are a variety of milkweed species, many are region-specific. Do your research before planting any species of milkweed.



## What you can do to help?

- Only plant native milkweed. In Illinois, those species include common milkweed, swamp milkweed, butterfly weed, whorled milkweed, poke milkweed.
- Educate yourself. Make sure your information is from a reliable source such as not-for-profit organizations working to save the monarch butterfly, government sites such as fish and wildlife, or university extension programs such as the University of Illinois Extension. Visit reputable websites and be weary of potential fundraising scams.
- Limit your use of pesticides.

## What is PSC doing?

### Building our own butterfly garden this spring!

The purpose of this project is to provide a habitat for migrating butterflies while educating students about habitat loss and the benefits of native plants. The garden can be utilized by classes in multiple disciplines including but not limited to science, math, arts, and communication. Butterfly gardens can:

- Educate students on ecology, native plants and insect life cycles.
- Inspire creativity in students, especially related to music, art and writing.
- Provide a relaxing environment for studying.
- Promote environmental awareness.
- Provide many environmental benefits.

## Fun Fact

The cardenolide alkaloids contained in the leaves and stems of most milkweeds make them toxic to vertebrate herbivores. When Monarch larvae ingest milkweed, they ingest their toxins called cardiac glycosides. These compounds are sequestered in their wings and exoskeletons, making the larvae and adult Monarch toxic to many potential predators.

For more information, or to make a donation, contact Alessandra Cairo, sustainability coordinator at [acairo@prairiestate.edu](mailto:acairo@prairiestate.edu).