

# *Asclepias fascicularis*

(narrow-leaf milkweed)



A perennial California native plant reaching 1-4 ft. tall and spreading, narrow-leaf milkweed thrives in full sun with little water, once established. Pinkish-white flowers appear late spring to summer. After flowering, the plants form seed pods that open to reveal seeds attached to silky pappi, which aid in wind dispersal. Unlike tropical milkweed, which stays green year round, narrow-leaf milkweed goes dormant late fall through winter and re-emerges in the spring. **This seasonal winter dormancy is an important cue for the monarchs to stop laying eggs and overwinter on trees along the California coast.** Although native to the Los Angeles region, narrow-leaf milkweed has become less common due to habitat loss.

## Starting from Seed

California native milkweed seeds should be sown in spring. At the earliest, you can start the seed in March, but germination can be achieved all the way into July. For in-ground sowing, choose a spot in full sun where the milkweed can spread freely and develop properly over time. For best results, sow seeds just under the soil surface, thoroughly water in, and keep consistently moist, but not soggy. To sow in pots, use a well-draining potting soil, such as a cactus mix or TPF's custom mix. Sow two to four seeds just below the soil surface; water gently until water runs out the bottom of the pot. Keep container off of the ground, protected from birds and rodents, and in an area that gets good light. Keep soil

consistently moist. Robust seedlings can be planted in the ground through late summer.

## Plant Maintenance

Over the first few summers, water deeply at the base of the plant to support its development. During late fall and winter dormancy, feel free to tidy up your milkweed plant by cutting it to the ground, but don't pull up the roots! It does not need supplemental water during its dormant period, and will grow back from the roots in early spring. Over time, narrow-leaf milkweed spreads underground, forming a larger base each year. Milkweeds attract a host of insects, including red and black milkweed bugs and orange oleander aphids. **Do not hose them off or use pesticides, or you will kill beneficial insects, such as lady beetles, lacewings, and syrphid flies, as well as monarch eggs and caterpillars!**

## The Monarch and Milkweed Relationship

Monarchs, like all butterflies, undergo complete metamorphosis, a process by which they develop from an immature larval stage (caterpillar) to a pupal stage (chrysalis), and then emerge as winged adults.



Our beloved monarch butterfly will nectar at many flowers, but the female will lay her precious eggs on just one plant genus: *Asclepias* (milkweed). **Since monarch caterpillars can only feed on milkweed leaves, milkweed is essential to the survival of the butterfly.** You can help monarch butterflies by planting native milkweed in your garden, thus giving them a place to

raise their young -- and for you to watch their fascinating lifecycle unfold!

Non-native tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) is commonly sold in nurseries and garden centers in California. Recent scientific studies show that tropical milkweed is contributing to the increased prevalence of OE, a parasite that infects the wings and bodies of adult monarchs, and then spreads to their caterpillars, creating disease in multiple generations. **Conservationists are encouraging gardeners to instead plant regionally native milkweed** (see Resources for more information). If you have tropical milkweed, we recommend that you remove it entirely from your garden.

## Resources

### Growing Milkweed from Seed

[theodorepayne.org/growing-milkweed-from-seed/](http://theodorepayne.org/growing-milkweed-from-seed/)

### Beyond Milkweed: More Plants for Monarchs

[theodorepayne.org/beyond-milkweed-more-plants-for-monarchs/](http://theodorepayne.org/beyond-milkweed-more-plants-for-monarchs/)

### Native Plants for Butterflies and Moths

[us39.siteground.us/~theo50/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/BUTTERFLIES-2016\\_FINAL.pdf](http://us39.siteground.us/~theo50/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/BUTTERFLIES-2016_FINAL.pdf)

### For the Monarch Butterfly, a Long Road Back (support for planting California native milkweed instead of tropical milkweed)

[nytimes.com/2014/11/18/science/monarchs-may-be-loved-to-death.html](http://nytimes.com/2014/11/18/science/monarchs-may-be-loved-to-death.html)

### The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

[xerces.org/western-monarch-call-to-action](http://xerces.org/western-monarch-call-to-action)



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