

Milkweed for Butterflies

While several species of butterfly larvae feed on milkweed, it is critical for the Monarch life cycle: Monarchs *lay their eggs only on milkweeds*, which provide the only food for their larvae.

Milkweed Native to Texas

The two most important for Monarchs in Texas are:

- Green Milkweed (*Asclepias viridis*)
- Antelope Horns (*Asclepias asperula*)

Other milkweeds found in Texas include:

- Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
- Texas Milkweed (*Asclepias texana*)
- Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
- Whorled Milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)

Is Milkweed Toxic?

According to the USDA, milkweed is toxic to sheep, cattle and sometimes horses. The main species implicated are:

- Labriform milkweed (*Asclepias labriformis*)
- Western whorled milkweed (*A. subverticillata*)
- Woollypod milkweed (*A. eriocarpa*)
- Mexican whorled milkweed (*A. fascicularis*)

Many people suffer skin irritation from the sap, but ingestion can cause nausea, vomiting and rarely, death in humans.

Sources of Milkweed in Texas

- Natives of Texas Nursery, Kerrville
- Native American Seed, Junction
- Rainbow Gardens, San Antonio
- GreenSense Native Plant Nursery, Garland
- Canyon's Edge Plants, Canyon
- Weston Gardens In Bloom, Fort Worth

Source: Journey North Resource Brochure. Not confirmed recently.

Why Non-native Milkweed Is Bad for Monarchs

Non-native milkweeds have an extended growing season compared to native milkweed. This results in two specific problems:

- Disrupting the normal breeding cycle. This tricks monarchs into an extra breeding cycle, causes them to delay or even skip their southern migration back to Mexico. Our cold winters will kill those that do not leave when they should.
- Increasing the chance of disease. OE (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*), the parasite that causes deformation of monarch wings, which severely impacts their ability to migrate. Non-native milkweed has a longer growing season, and it may not be killed in our mild winters, leaving it as a reservoir for the parasite. Native milkweeds usually die back even in mild winters.

Non-native Milkweed to Avoid

- Tropical Milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*)
 - Most common sold in US
 - Native to Central and South America
 - Cultivars in red, orange and yellow, but all are *Asclepias curassavica*
- Balloon Milkweed (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*)
 - Less common but can be found in some nurseries
 - Native to Africa
 - Not much data on its effect on monarchs but it's probably best to avoid it

Source: <https://www.kynativeplants.com/post/dangers-of-non-native-milkweed-to-monarchs>