

Sonoma County Milkweed Planting Guide

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. The toxins in milkweed have not been shown to be harmful to livestock or people in small quantities, therefore milkweed can be planted on rangelands, yards, and in small clearings within forested lands to help revive the imperiled monarch population.



Monarch caterpillar on milkweed
Photo: Marie-Ève Garon-Labrecque



Heart-Leaf Milkweed
Photo: Zane Walker



Narrow Leaf Milkweed
Photo: Lenihan Mazur



Showy Milkweed
Photo: Jay Chamberlain

Milkweed Species in Sonoma County

Heart-leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias cordifolia*)

Bloom Time: March to July (early blooming)

Habitat: Slopes and grassy openings in mixed evergreen forest and chaparral between 50 to 2000 meters.

How to ID: Dark reddish purple flowers, each flower has 5 stamens fused into a column and 5 lighter colored hoods; 300 to 600 cm tall.

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 (*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



Yarrow
Photo: Diane Etchison



Coyote Bush
Photo: Talila Golan



Gumweed
Photo: Laura Moon



Milkweed on rangeland
Photo: Nancy Mueller

AVOID TROPICAL MILKWEED

Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) 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.—gumweed
- *Helianthus* sp.—sunflower
- *Heteromeles arbutifolia*—toyon
- *Monardella villosa*—coyote mint
- *Salix* sp.—willow
- *Salvia* sp.—sage
- *Solidago* sp.—goldenrod
- *Symphytotrichum* sp.—CA aster
- *Verbena lasiostachys*—vervain

Interested in planting milkweed?

Gold Ridge RCD and Sonoma RCD are available to provide technical assistance on incorporating monarch friendly plants into hedgerows and Carbon Farm Plans. We will also be hosting a monarch plant sale this spring.

For more information, contact us:

Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District

Isis Howard - isis@goldridgercd.org

Sonoma Resource Conservation District

Jacob McDaniel - jmcdaniel@sonomarc.org



Sonoma Resource
Conservation District

1221 Farmers Lane, Suite F
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
www.sonomarc.org



Gold Ridge Resource
Conservation District

2776 Sullivan Rd,
Sebastopol, CA, 95472
www.goldridgercd.org

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