



## Germinating Milkweed from Seed

### Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

### Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)

The methods below are for Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*).

1. Both species of milkweed require a cold, moist stratification period. This means that the seed after being harvested, dried and cleaned needs to have a "chilling" period. Nature's method is done through the winter weather. To obtain similar results the seed should be mixed with moist sand, sealed in an airtight container, and placed in storage 33-38 degrees Fahrenheit. (A refrigerator works best). The period of chilling varies with the species. *A. syriaca* requires 30 days of cold stratification. *A. incarnata* requires 30-90 days of cold stratification. Some growers opt to soak the *A. incarnata* seed in hot water (190 degree F.) for 12 hours. [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) suggests this process be repeated for a total of 3 times before sowing the seed.
2. The seed can be sown in open trays using a commercial seed starter mix. It is usually better to sow seeds 2-3 per cell in a deep flat (cell counts vary). Cover very lightly with soil. I have found a 38 ct. 4 inch deep tray to work well allowing room for root growth and the least amount of disturbance when transplanting. However, commercial seeding trays can work if that is what is available. If the trays are to remain inside, the air temperature should be maintained between 65-75 degrees F. A heating pad can be used underneath to help with germination. Keep the soil moist by misting or spraying. Do not overwater! A plastic cover can be placed over the tray until germination. Light is very important for continued growth and can be obtained by using a fluorescent overhead fixture. A timer placed on the light source will assure 14-16 hours of needed light. Plants usually take 4-8 weeks to reach a stage where they can be moved to a cold frame to harden off.
3. If you would like to sow in trays outside, you can follow the same instructions above, eliminating the need for the cold stratification as the outside temps will take care of it. Just keep in a protected area and check occasionally, especially as the weather warms. They will need watering after the last frost. Also, rodents can be a problem. A wire mesh covering can help. Again, a simple cold frame can speed the germination and growing time, but requires more diligence.

Helpful websites are:

- [www.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs\\_asn.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_asn.pdf)
- [www.ehow.com/info\\_8473460milkweed-perennials.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_8473460milkweed-perennials.html)
- [www.easywildflowers.com/quality/asc.syria.htm](http://www.easywildflowers.com/quality/asc.syria.htm)
- [www.prairiemoonnursery.com](http://www.prairiemoonnursery.com)

# CREATING A CERTIFIED MONARCH BUTTERFLY HABITAT

Here are some guidelines for creating a monarch habitat in your garden, adapted from Monarch Watch's Waystation Certification Requirements ([www.monarchwatch.org/waystations](http://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations)) and "Plight of the Butterfly," by Gabriel Popkin, *THE AMERICAN GARDENER*, March/April 2014.

- **Size:** A garden area of at least 100 square feet is recommended.
- **Exposure:** At least six hours of sun a day
- **Drainage and Soil Types:** Milkweeds (exclusive caterpillar food of Monarch) do best in low-clay soils with good drainage.
- **Shelter:** Plants should be close together but not overcrowded.
- **Milkweed Plants (*Asclepias sp.*):** Plant at least 10 individual plants, preferably multiple species.
- **Nectar plants:** Plant at least four species whose bloom times are distributed throughout the migration season to increase the length of time nectar will be available. The adult butterflies are not exclusive to milkweed. Just the caterpillars.
- **Management:** Even native plantings need to be maintained. Water during prolonged droughts and weed regularly. Mulch with compost or shredded leaves in spring.

## OTHER MONARCH FRIENDLY PROGRAMS

- **Xerces Society's "Bring Back The Pollinators" conservation campaign pledge** asks gardeners to plant nectar plants, provide homes for pollinators, avoid harmful pesticides, and engage in pollinator outreach. <http://www.xerces.org/bringbackthepollinators/>
- **North American Butterfly Association's Butterfly Garden and Habitat Program certification** requires three native food plants for caterpillars and three native nectar plants for adults. <http://nababutterfly.com/butterfly-garden-certification-program/>

Since we have lost 90% of the Monarch population, (according to Doug Tallamy, Prof. Entomology, U of Delaware) and it is an iconic species that draws attention to the need for productive plants that support caterpillars in the landscape, this project has merit.



Butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*

## MORE INFORMATION

- National Audubon Society: <http://www.audubon.org/>
- The Nature Conservancy: <http://www.nature.org/>
- PlantNative: <http://www.plantnative.org/>
- New England Wild Flower Society: <http://www.newfs.org/>
- Arbor Day Foundation: <http://www.arborday.org/>
- Richard Louv, author: <http://richardlouv.com/>
- Children & Nature Network: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>



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