

Milkweed Plants will be available for pick-up at Fontana Park around May 18, 2021. The three species shown below in red will be available as **plants** for \$5/plant. Planting information for live plants is on page 2. All four are still available as **seed** FREE at the Nature Center while supplies last.

**Swamp milkweed** is a plant that can handle wetter soil locations, but it does not need to have wet soil. It grows 4-5 feet tall and the stem often branches. It has a shallower root system and can be easily split and transplanted. The plant will likely have 1 stem the first year, and if it does well, will often produce more stems in the same location in following years, but it does not spread from the location. Swamp milkweed has smaller pink clusters of blossoms at the end of the stems and will bloom through August if the flowers are trimmed off after blooming. Flowers are not as fragrant, but are also high in nectar and attract many pollinators.

**Butterfly milkweed** is the milkweed that is most readily available commercially – you can get seed at most flower seed vendors in the spring. Plants are also available at nurseries that sell native plants. Butterfly milkweed grows only 2-3 feet tall, has a large taproot, and like swamp milkweed, will grow more stems from the root once it is established. Bright orange flower clusters full of nectar are the hallmark of this plant. The flowers will start lower on the stem and continue to bloom up the stem as the summer progresses. Again, if the dead flowers/young seeds are removed, blooming will last longer.

**Whorled Milkweed** is a species that shows little resemblance to a milkweed – until you look closely at the flower structure. The leaves are almost needle-like and emerge in groups of 3-5 from the stem in whorls. Stems grow 1-3 feet tall, seldom branching unless broken or eaten. Roots are thin, shallow & rhizomous and the plant will spread. Although the spreading nature of whorled milkweed is not as dense as Common, plants can be easily managed (or transplanted) by pulling those that are unwanted.

**Common milkweed** is the plant that most people recognize as milkweed. It can grow 6+ feet tall once established and has a deep rhizomous root structure that will result in many more milkweeds growing in the same area in future years. If you plant this milkweed be sure you have room and don't be afraid to pull out new shoots that are growing where you don't want them. Common milkweed has a pink ball of flowers that blooms in July and is very fragrant and attractive to pollinators for its nectar. If shorter plants are desired, the stem can be cut back to 12 inches and branches will sprout back.

All four of these species are used by monarch caterpillars, but adults tend to lay their eggs on common and swamp milkweed first, then whorled before choosing the “hairier” leaves of butterfly milkweed.

PLANTING MILKWEED **SEED** IN IOWA – Needs cold stratification, so best results if planted in fall or winter.

1. Plant seed on soil that has been raked or slightly loosened with a spade, fork, or trowel
2. Plant seed at the surface of the soil. Then lightly rake soil to help the seed make good contact or water with a sprinkler to do the same. Don't plant the seed below more than ¼ inch of soil or it will not grow.
3. Mark the location you planted so you will not forget in the spring. Then leave the seed to the cold.

Additionally, Meadow Blazingstar **seed** is available for free inside the nature center. This is a favorite flower for migrating fall monarchs. Be patient with this plant. It will look like a blade of grass or 2 in year one while producing a tiny bulb below ground, produce larger leaves and a sturdy bulb below ground in year two, before flowering in year three and beyond. Plant seed as you do milkweed seed.

## MILKWEED PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

### Placement for best results:



Poorly-drained soils – *A. incarnata*

Medium-drained soils – *A. syriaca* and *A. incarnata*

Well-drained soils – *A. tuberosa* and *A. syriaca*, and all other species.



Full shade – No species

Partial shade – *A. exaltata* and *A. variegata*

Full sun – All other milkweed species

### Planting instructions:

Dig a hole that is slightly deeper than the pot. Add a small amount of compost or other plant food to the bottom of the hole. Place the plant in the hole and cover with dirt. Tamp the dirt around the plant gently. Water thoroughly. Place mulch\* around the base of the plant. Water once per week for three weeks or until the plant is established.

\*Mulching will reduce water loss and weed growth.