

# Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

The common milkweed, also known as *Asclepias syriaca*, is found in most of the eastern United States and southern Canada. *Asclepias* references the Greek god of medicine Asclepius, commemorating the historical use of milkweed as a medicine. *Syriaca* translates to “of Syria”, the place botanists falsely believed milkweed originated from.

Milkweed is a perennial plant that grows well in sandy soil in sunny areas. Growing 5-6 feet tall, common milkweed grows in clusters with leaves 6-8 inches long and 2-4 inches wide. The flowers of the milkweed vary on the spectrum from white to purple, producing fragrant nectar. These flowers each have five petals, growing in a spherical pattern. When cut, the plant seeps a milky latex, hence the name milkweed. More than 450 species of insects feed off of the nectar produced by milkweed, making it a crucial species from prairies. Outside the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis, Missouri, lies 6 acres of reconstructed tallgrass prairie. This natural habitat within a city landscape harbors many native plants and animals contributing to a resurgence of pollinators and other wildlife and recovering the biodiversity of the region.



Photo credit: Amos Oliver Doyle



For example, the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) uses the milkweed as a larval host plant where caterpillars feed on the leaves. Due to levels of a toxic cardiac glycoside in the plant, insects who are able to eat milkweeds, such as the monarch caterpillars incorporate this chemical into their bodies and become toxic to predators. Milkweed plants are necessary for the survival of monarch caterpillars and butterflies. Their flowers also provide nectar for many other insect pollinators such as bees, wasps, flies, and beetles.

This 3D model was made using Fusion 360, a popular Computer Assisted Design (CAD) program. A reference image of common milkweed was used, to trace separately a flower and a stem. The flower model was used to create the inflorescence that was later attached to the stem model. After initial sketches were made, they were extruded up, colored, and attached for the final result.



DONALD DANFORTH  
PLANT SCIENCE CENTER

DISCOVERY | COMMUNITY | IMPACT