

Asclepias tuberosa
Butterfly Milkweed

Why Observe?

Butterfly milkweed grows over much of the US East of the Rocky Mountains and through the Southwest. Milkweed is an important part of the life cycle of the monarch butterfly, as monarch caterpillars can only feed on milkweed. Declines in monarch populations are directly correlated with loss of milkweed and milkweed habitat. Increasing milkweed populations will have the greatest conservation impact on increasing monarch populations as well.

Tips for Identification

Butterfly milkweed is a perennial, herbaceous plant with multiple stems, growing 1 to 3 feet tall. Its small, orange to red, and sometimes yellow, flowers are grouped into showy clusters. Each flower has both male and female parts, and is pollinated by insects. Leaves are alternate on the stem, are lance-shaped, and are 5-10 cm long.

Be aware there is variation from individual to individual within a species, so your plant may not look exactly like the one pictured. If you are uncertain whether or not a phenophase is occurring, report a “?” for its status until it becomes clear what you are observing after subsequent visits.



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Image Needed

email
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Initial growth

New growth of the plant is visible after a period of no growth (winter or drought), either from above-ground buds with green tips, or new green or white shoots breaking through the soil surface. Growth is considered "initial" on each bud or shoot until the first leaf has fully unfolded. For seedlings, "initial" growth includes the presence of the one or two small, round or elongated leaves (cotyledons) before the first true leaf has unfolded.



Samantha Brewer.
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Leaves

One or more live, fully unfolded leaves are visible on the plant. For seedlings, consider only true leaves and do not count the one or two small, round or elongated leaves (cotyledons) that are found on the stem almost immediately after the seedling germinates. Do not include fully dried or dead leaves.

Flowers or flower buds

One or more fresh open or unopened flowers or flower buds are visible on the plant. Include flower buds or inflorescences that are swelling or expanding, but do not include those that are tightly closed and not actively growing (dormant). Also do not include wilted or dried flowers.



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Open flowers

One or more open, fresh flowers are visible on the plant. Flowers are considered "open" when the reproductive parts (male stamens or female pistils) are visible between or within unfolded or open flower parts (petals, floral tubes or sepals). Do not include wilted or dried flowers.

Fruits

One or more fruits are visible on the plant. For *Asclepias tuberosa*, the fruit is large and pod-like and changes from green to tan or brown and splits open to expose seeds with fluff. Do not include empty fruits that have already dropped all of their seeds.



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Ripe fruits

One or more ripe fruits are visible on the plant. For *Asclepias tuberosa*, a fruit is considered ripe when it has turned tan or brown and has split open to expose seeds with fluff. Do not include empty fruits that have already dropped all of their seeds.

Phenophases not pictured: Recent fruit or seed drop