

# Milkweed in Virginia: Identification Guide

You may be familiar with Common Milkweed and Butterfly Weed, but did you know there are up to 14 Milkweed species in Virginia? This guide highlights six of the lesser-known species you might find on the landscape!



Smithsonian  
National Zoological Park  
Conservation Biology Institute

*Asclepias incarnata*  
**Swamp Milkweed**



*Asclepias purpurascens*  
**Purple Milkweed**



*Asclepias amplexicaulis*  
**Clasping Milkweed**



*Asclepias viridiflora* Raf  
**Green Comet Milkweed**



*Asclepias verticillata*  
**Whorled Milkweed**



*Asclepias variegata* L.  
**Redring Milkweed**



Swamp Milkweed  
Leaf Beetle



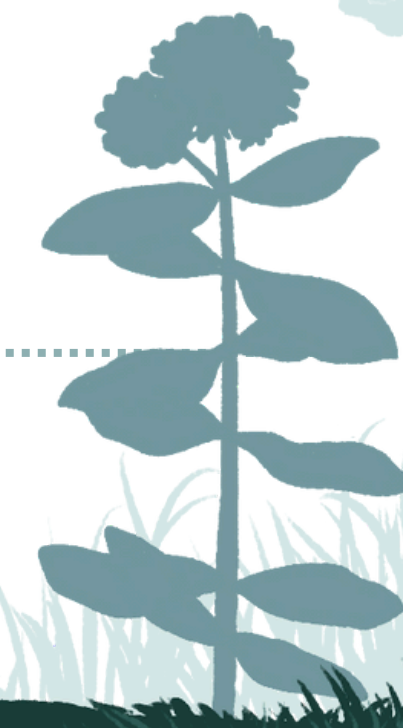
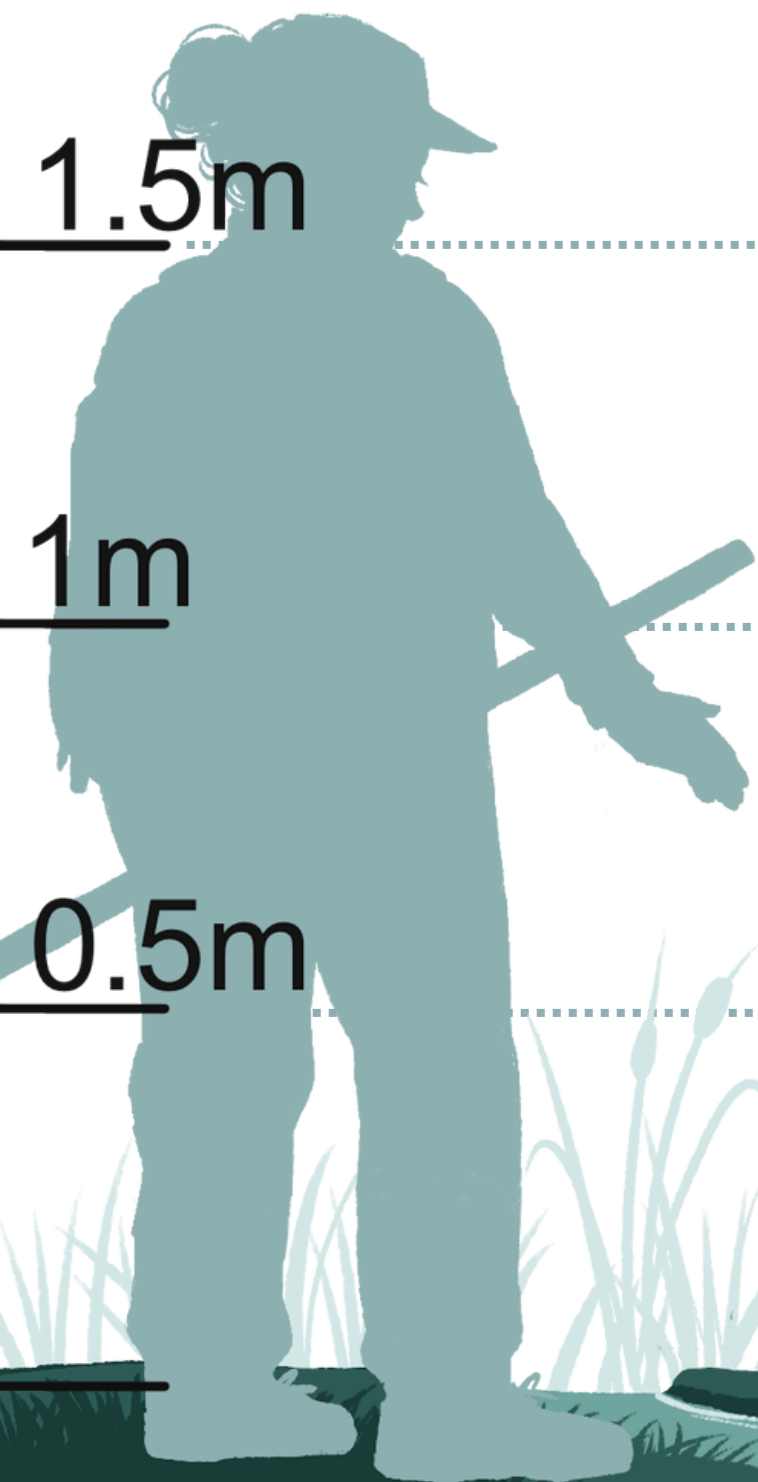


2m

1.5m

1m

0.5m



Milkweeds are the sole host plants for Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*). Butterflies will lay their eggs on plants in the *Asclepias* genus. Caterpillars will eat the toxic leaves of the plants, making them unpalatable to predators. There are 3-4 generations of monarchs every summer, with the last generation completing the famed migration to California and Mexico.

Monarch caterpillars grow for about two weeks before creating their chrysalis. After pupating for 8-15 days, the insect will emerge as a butterfly.



Monarch caterpillars use more than Common Milkweed! Any of these species are beneficial to Monarchs.



*Asclepias incarnata*  
**Swamp Milkweed**

- Bloom Time: July-Sept
- Habitat: Wet meadows, riparian, swamps, and ditches
- Flower Color: Pink and White

*Asclepias purpurascens*  
**Purple Milkweed**

- Bloom Time: May-July
- Habitat: Dry-wet prairies, meadows, savannas, and open woodlands
- Flower Color: Pink and Purple/Lavendar

*Asclepias amplexicaulis*  
**Clasping Milkweed**

- Bloom Time: May-July
- Habitat: Sandy soils, roadsides, old fields, and dry, open woodlands
- Flower Color: Pink and Cream or Green

*Asclepias viridiflora* Raf  
**Green Comet Milkweed**

- Bloom Time: May-Aug
- Habitat: Well drained prairies and woodland edges
- Flower Color: Green and Yellow

*Asclepias verticillata*  
**Whorled Milkweed**

- Bloom Time: July-Sept
- Habitat: Dry, rocky fields, open woods, and roadsides
- Flower Color: Green and White

*Asclepias variegata* L.  
**Redring Milkweed**

- Bloom Time: May-Sept
- Habitat: Open woodlands and woodland edges
- Flower Color: White and Pink/Purple