

# MILKWEEDS OF BEVERLY SHORES

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Beverly Shores is blessed with at least three species of milkweed, all of which are relatively easy to locate and identify. A decline in the monarch butterfly population has brought renewed interest in these plants, once considered to be weeds.

The most common milkweed, aptly named “common milkweed” (*Asclepius syriaca*), is frequently seen along roadsides, railroads and in other disturbed areas. Stop and look closely at the common milkweed the next time you run into one. Take time to smell the spherical cluster of small, pinkish flowers. They are very fragrant and reminiscent of lilacs. It surprised me a great deal that such a humble plant has such a sweet smell. Common milkweed grows 3 to 4 feet tall and, as suggested by the name, will produce a milky sap if a leaf or stem is cut or broken. Many insects feed on the sweet nectar of common milkweed. That’s important, as cross pollination by insects is required by all of our milkweeds to produce a fertile seed. The monarch butterfly uses common milkweed and many other milkweed species to lay its eggs upon. Later, the emerging caterpillars feed upon the milkweed.



Common Milkweed



Swamp Milkweed

The next most abundant milkweed is swamp milkweed (*Ascleus Incarnata*). It grows in our wetland areas, particularly along the shallow edges. The flowers are somewhat brighter pink than common milkweed. They occur in tight clusters on the tops of the stems. The leaves are narrower and more pointed than those of common milkweed. The fragrance is lighter in swamp milkweed and somewhat spicy. Like common milkweed, swamp milkweed is very popular with insects for its nectar and is used by the monarch butterfly for its caterpillars. In spite of being found in nature only in wetlands, this plant does surprisingly well in ordinary gardens and even tolerate some dryness. Swamp milkweed grows 3 to 6 feet tall.

Possibly the showiest of our milkweeds is also the shortest (and sometimes hidden by its taller, neighboring plants). Butterfly weed (*Asclepius tuberosa*) is hardly a weed, being very unlikely to pop up anywhere and be unwanted. The brilliant orange flowers of butterfly weed brighten our summer roadsides, dumelands, and other dry, sunny areas. This it the only milkweed of our three that is not fragrant. It makes up for this deficiency with its beautiful color and its attraction of butterflies and other pollinators. Butterfly weed, unlike the others, does not produce milky latex.



Butterfly Weed

All of these milkweeds are available commercially and make excellent additions to your garden while at the same time providing food for pollinating insects and monarch butterflies. If you have questions about milkweeds or other native or non-native plants, don’t hesitate to contact Terry Bonace ([tbonace@gmail.com](mailto:tbonace@gmail.com)) or Candice Smith ([candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com](mailto:candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com)). Also please visit our website at [www.bsrg.org](http://www.bsrg.org) for further information on invasive plants and native replacements.