

Poison Milkweed

Asclepias subverticillata (A. Gray) Vail

Western Whorled Milkweed, Horsetail Milkweed

The whorled milkweed of the Southwest and southern Rockies: thin, wiry, colony-forming, and the species behind most milkweed poisoning cases in the region. Ecologically useful on wild ground, but not a plant to introduce deliberately.



SALLY KING. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

Key facts

Field	Value	Field	Value
Status	Native	Height	1ft-3ft
Flowers	white, green	Bloom	June to September
Light	Full sun	Soil	Dry
USDA zones	4-9	Leaves	whorled, threadlike
Sap	Milky latex	Roots	Rhizomatous, spreads by root
Stratification	30 days cold-moist	States	10

How to identify it

- Very narrow leaves in whorls, with smaller leaves clustered in the axils giving a bushy, feathery look.
- Forms extensive rhizomatous colonies in disturbed sandy ground, roadsides and overgrazed pasture.
- Small greenish-white flowers in clusters along the upper stem.

Ecology

Monarchs and queens do use it, and in the arid Southwest it is often the most abundant milkweed available. Its dense colonies support numerous milkweed specialists including large and small milkweed bugs and milkweed tussock moths.

Growing

Not recommended for planting. It colonizes aggressively, is difficult to remove, and creates a genuine hazard where horses or livestock are kept.

Cautions

The most dangerous milkweed for livestock in the western United States. Poisoning of horses, cattle and sheep is well documented, most often through baled hay. Do not plant near paddocks or hay meadows.

Where it grows

Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Wyoming

More photographs



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References

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- GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org/species/3170284>
- iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/127159>
- BONAP county map: <https://bonap.net/MapGallery/County/Asclepias%20subverticillata.png>

<https://milkweedusa.com/species/poison-milkweed/>