

Prairie Milkweed

Asclepias sullivantii Engelm. ex A. Gray

Sullivant's Milkweed, Smooth Milkweed

Common milkweed's refined cousin: the same big pink umbels and broad leaves, but smooth and hairless throughout, with an elegant red midrib and none of the coarseness. A tallgrass prairie plant that has declined sharply with the prairie itself.



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Key facts

Field	Value	Field	Value
Status	Native	Height	2ft-4ft
Flowers	pink, rose	Bloom	June to July
Light	Full sun	Soil	Average, Wet
USDA zones	3-7	Leaves	opposite, oblong
Sap	Milky latex	Roots	Rhizomatous, spreads by root
Stratification	30 days cold-moist	States	14

How to identify it

- Completely smooth and hairless, with no down on stems, leaves or pods.
- Leaf midrib is often flushed pink or red.
- Leaves have a small abrupt point at the tip and are held stiffly upright.
- Pods are smooth with only a few short blunt projections, unlike the warty pods of common milkweed.

Ecology

A high-value monarch host with broad, soft leaves, now uncommon because it grows on exactly the deep moist prairie soils that were converted to row crops. Conservation-listed in several states.

Growing

A far better garden plant than common milkweed: similar looks, much slower spread. Prefers heavier, moister soil. Seed and plants are increasingly available from prairie nurseries.

Cautions

Standard milkweed cautions.

Where it grows

Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin

More photographs



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References

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- GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org/species/3170265>
- iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/158761>
- BONAP county map: <https://bonap.net/MapGallery/County/Asclepias%20sullivantii.png>

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