

Showy Milkweed

Asclepias speciosa Torr.

Greek Milkweed, Creek Milkweed

The West's answer to common milkweed, and the single most important monarch host plant between the Great Plains and the Sierra Nevada. Its flowers are the showiest in the genus: star-shaped, rose-pink, with long pointed hoods that give each cluster a spiky, ornamental look. Gray-green velvety foliage sets it apart at fifty paces.



Dcrjsr. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

Key facts

Field	Value	Field	Value
Status	Native	Height	2ft-5ft
Flowers	pink, rose	Bloom	May to August
Light	Full sun	Soil	Average, Dry
USDA zones	3-9	Leaves	opposite, ovate
Sap	Milky latex	Roots	Rhizomatous, spreads by root
Stratification	30 days cold-moist	States	21

How to identify it

- Hoods are long, narrow and sharply pointed, giving the flower head a distinctly starry silhouette. This is the key difference from common milkweed.
- Leaves are thick, gray-green and densely velvety-hairy on both sides.
- Flower clusters are held upright to slightly nodding, not fully drooping.
- Pods are woolly and covered in soft, blunt projections.

Ecology

Carries the bulk of western monarch breeding along irrigation ditches, riverbanks and roadsides from the Front Range to the Cascades. Bumble bees, digger bees and hummingbird moths work the flowers heavily. In much of the Intermountain West it is the only large-leaved milkweed available to a female monarch.

Growing

Far better behaved than common milkweed but still rhizomatous, so expect a slowly widening patch rather than a discrete clump. Tolerates alkaline soils, clay, drought and cold. It is the default milkweed for a Colorado, Montana, Idaho or Utah garden, and it looks good enough for a front border.

Cautions

Mildly toxic to grazing animals in quantity. Sap is a skin and eye irritant, so wash hands after cutting stems.

Where it grows

Arizona, California, Colorado, Iowa, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming

More photographs



USFWS Mountain Prairie. Public domain. Wikimed



USFWS Mountain Prairie. Public domain. Wikimed



USFWS Mountain Prairie. Public domain. Wikimed

References

- Plants of the World Online: <https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:94654-1>
- GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org/species/3170260>
- iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/62292>
- BONAP county map: <https://bonap.net/MapGallery/County/Asclepias%20speciosa.png>

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