

Tropical Milkweed

Asclepias curassavica L.

Bloodflower, Mexican Butterfly Weed, Scarlet Milkweed

The scarlet-and-gold milkweed sold in nearly every garden center. It is not native to the United States, it flowers relentlessly, and in frost-free regions that is exactly the problem: it disrupts monarch migration and builds up parasite loads. Beautiful plant, genuinely bad ecological actor south of the frost line.



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Key facts

Field	Value	Field	Value
Status	Introduced	Height	2ft-4ft
Flowers	red, orange, yellow	Bloom	nearly year-round in frost-free areas
Light	Full sun, Part shade	Soil	Average
USDA zones	8-11	Leaves	opposite, lanceolate
Sap	Milky latex	Roots	Fibrous, clump-forming and easy to move
Stratification	None needed	States	11

How to identify it

- Flowers are two-toned, a red or orange corolla with a bright yellow-orange crown, unlike any native species.
- Blooms continuously rather than in a defined season.
- Smooth, dark green lance-shaped leaves; slender upright stems; no basal woodiness in the first year.
- Pods are narrow, smooth and upright.

Ecology

Monarchs will lay on it eagerly, but in the Gulf states, California and Florida it stays green all winter and encourages butterflies to break their migration and breed year-round. Those resident populations accumulate the protozoan parasite *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE), which shortens lifespans and deforms wings. Studies also show that cardenolide levels rise under heat, which may harm larvae.

Growing

Grown as an annual north of zone 8 it is harmless and useful. It germinates without stratification, blooms in twelve weeks from seed and dies at the first frost. In zones 9 to 11, either cut it to the ground each October through February

or, better, replace it with a native species.

Cautions

Several US counties and native plant societies now discourage or restrict its sale. If you garden in Florida, the Gulf Coast, southern California, Arizona or Hawaii, please choose a native milkweed instead.

Where it grows

Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas

More photographs



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Guérin Nicolas (messages) 09:51, 25 September



Guérin Nicolas (messages) 09:52, 25 September

References

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- GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org/species/3170241>
- iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/75602>
- BONAP county map: <https://bonap.net/MapGallery/County/Asclepias%20curassavica.png>

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