

Whorled Milkweed

Asclepias verticillata L.

Eastern Whorled Milkweed, Horsetail Milkweed

A wiry, fine-textured milkweed that looks more like a horsetail than an Asclepias, with needle-thin leaves in whorls up a slim stem and small greenish-white flowers late in the season. It slips into thin, poor, dry ground where nothing else will grow.



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Key facts

Field	Value	Field	Value
Status	Native	Height	1ft-2.5ft
Flowers	white, green	Bloom	June to September
Light	Full sun	Soil	Dry, Average
USDA zones	3-9	Leaves	whorled, threadlike
Sap	Milky latex	Roots	Rhizomatous, spreads by root
Stratification	30 days cold-moist	States	42

How to identify it

- Leaves are thread-fine, one to two millimeters wide, arranged in whorls of three to six around the stem.
- The whole plant is slender and grass-like until it flowers.
- Small white to greenish flowers in several small clusters along the upper stem.
- Blooms notably late, often the last milkweed still in flower.

Ecology

A favorite of small native bees and predatory wasps, and a reliable late host for monarch larvae after the big species have gone tough and seedy. Its thin leaves dry quickly, so caterpillars often need several plants.

Growing

Thrives on drought, gravel, thin soil and neglect. It spreads by slender rhizomes and self-sows freely, so treat it as a filler in a prairie planting rather than a specimen. Very easy from seed with a month of cold stratification.

Cautions

Among the more toxic milkweeds to livestock relative to its size, because the whorled-leaved species concentrate cardenolides. Not a plant for a grazed paddock.

Where it grows

Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Vermont, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Wyoming

More photographs



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References

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- GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org/species/3170235>
- iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/125379>
- BONAP county map: <https://bonap.net/MapGallery/County/Asclepias%20verticillata.png>

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