

FOUR MILKWEED SPECIES

There are four species of Milkweed growing in gardens and in the fields at EastView. Common Milkweed **(1)**, with which everyone is familiar. Rose or Swamp Milkweed **(2)**, whose color gives it away. Showy Milkweed **(3)**, whose flowers look like they have crowns, and the Butterfly Milkweed **(4)**, that has beautiful yellow and orange flowers.



(1) Common Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*,
© Dick Harlow

The milkweed we see in fields and meadows as well as coming up in our gardens is known as **Common Milkweed**. It has a toxic sap which most insects will stay clear of. However, there also are those insects that feed on the leaves, the nectar of the flowers, and seeds. As well as the Monarch butterfly who lays its eggs on the leaves, there are bees, wasps, ants, beetles and flies which can be found on the flowers. Along with other milkweeds, this group of plants is the most important food source for the Monarch caterpillars.



(2) Swamp (Rose) Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*,
© Dick Harlow

AUGUST 15 – 31, 2019 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

This particular milkweed has a beautiful array of rose-colored flowers. However, unlike the Common Milkweed, the **Swamp Milkweed** by its initial name will not survive in the garden if it is allowed to dry out! As is true with all milkweeds it is the plant that the Monarch butterfly will search out to deposit its eggs. Case in point, of the volunteer milkweed species in our gardens, the Monarch seems to first find the Rose/Swamp Milkweed to deposit its eggs.



(3) Showy Milkweed, *Asclepias speciosa*,
© Dick Harlow

The **Showy Milkweed** is a mid-western milkweed, not native to New England. Its range extends from Michigan west to the pacific coast and from Texas to Central Canada. Therefore, when you see this plant in our neighborhood you know it was bought and introduced to an eastern garden. Yes, it has a beautiful flower head and when the flower opens up its petals look like horns; and they stretch out giving the plant the look that is quite different from Common Milkweed.



(4) Butterfly Milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*,
© Dick Harlow

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Although you can see yellow or orange flowered milkweed in many gardens, I hadn't remembered seeing it until I traveled to the mid-west a number of years ago. There I saw large clumps of this wild milkweed flowering and being covered with butterflies, including the Monarch. Thus, I fell in love with this orange milkweed.



(5) Pearl Crescent, *Phyciodes tharos*, on Swamp Milkweed, © Dick Harlow

Picture (5) is simply to show that other butterflies use milkweed flowers besides the Monarch. So, if you are interested in helping to provide habitat and pollen for pollinators as well as having beautiful and interesting visitors to your garden, consider various milkweed plants as an alternative.



Whorled Milkweed, *Asclepias verticillata*, just starting to bloom end of August. © Dick Harlow

Sorry, I should have added the 5th Milkweed species, Whorled Milkweed, but I didn't see the flower head until the 28th of August.

As a note: The Monarch Butterfly lays its eggs on Milkweed because the larva of the Monarch will only feed on milkweed sap, the white oozing liquid of all milkweeds, except the orange flowered milkweed, called Butterfly Weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*. This white sap is milky in color and thus the common name milkweed. However, the sap is toxic and contains cardiac glycosides that are poisonous to farm animals and humans.

Generally, birds find butterflies as a food source. However, much research has been done on the affect a Monarch butterfly has on birds due to its larval diet of milkweed. Birds find the Monarch distasteful and will regurgitate after trying to eat a Monarch.

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Therefore, there seems to be a learned aversion to Monarch butterflies and any other butterfly that looks like a Monarch, such as the Viceroy.

There is an evolutionary reason why mimicry helps the survival of an organism.

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S BUTTERFLY UNKNOWN



Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*, no white dot in forewings orange panel. © Dick Harlow

CAN YOU NAME THIS ONE?



ANSWER, NEXT NOTES

Bird Note: Please disinfect your bird feeders before putting them out this Fall and Winter. It is easy for birds to pick up disease from feeders. Make a weak solution of Clorox and water; then rinse thoroughly. Or you can purchase bird feeder cleaners, e.g. from Amazon or other stores. Many Thanks.

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OBSERVATIONS

BUTTERFLIES

Monarch, both male & female
Giant Swallowtail, nectaring on Swamp Milkweed
Black Swallowtail, male
White Admiral, 2nd time since 2014.
Painted Lady – nectaring on Buddlieja
Pearl Crescent – on Coreopsis

AMPHIBIANS

Leopard Frog
Bull Frog

MAMMALS

Gray Squirrel – checking feeders
Eastern Cottontail – 3 at one time.
Red Fox, bushy tail, excellent condition, hunting
Eastern Coyote - heard
Striped Skunk - odor

Weather Tidbits

Month of AUGUST 1-31, 2019

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 123.6 mm or 4.9” inches.

I know with the recent 6 days without precipitation we might lose site of the fact we have had a very wet August.

Average for Middlebury in August = 52.9 mm or 2.1 inches for the month. August 2019 is 2.8 inches above average.

Overcast Days: 9