

Swamp milkweed

(*Asclepias perennis*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

White swamp milkweed is an erect, herbaceous perennial wildflower that occurs naturally in floodplain swamps, marshes and wet ditches and along riverbanks. It typically blooms in late spring through early fall and attracts many pollinators. Like all members of the *Asclepias* genus, it is a larval host plant for Monarch and Queen butterflies. The plant contains a milky latex that is toxic to most animals, but Monarch and Queen caterpillars are adapted to feed on them despite the chemical defense. The flowers are an important nectar source for native bees, wasps and butterflies.

Flowers are white to pale pink and born in flat terminal or axillary umbels. Individual flowers have five reflexed corollas and an upright corona — a characteristic typical of milkweed flowers. The unopened buds have pink apices. One inflorescence can produce up to 25 flowers. Leaves are dark green, elliptic to lanceolate and glabrous. They are relatively long — between 3 and 5 inches — with short petioles and entire margins. Leaf arrangement is opposite. Seeds are flat, brown and born in smooth follicles that split open when ripe.

The genus *Asclepias* is named for Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, because some *Asclepias* species, such as *A. tuberosa*, are known to have medicinal properties. The species epithet *perennis* is Latin for “perennial.”

Family: Apocynaceae (Dogbane family)

Native range: Panhandle, north and central peninsula

To see where natural populations of Swamp milkweed have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to wet, well-drained loamy or sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 1–3' tall

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: Swamp milkweed works well in mixed butterfly and wildflower gardens planted along pond edges or similar moist sites. It also does well in a container. It can tolerate short periods of drought once established, but soil should be kept moist. Light annual pruning may be necessary to remove dead stems. White swamp milkweed is easy to propagate from seed. Seedlings may flower as early as three to four months.

Plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich