

Whorled milkweed

(*Asclepias verticillata*)

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

Whorled milkweed is one of the smaller, more delicate native milkweeds. It is found in pinelands throughout much of Florida. When not in bloom, it is easily overlooked. Its narrow leaves blend in with the grasses among which the plant typically grows. It flowers late spring through late summer and into early fall, attracting a variety of pollinators. Like all members of the *Asclepias* genus, Whorled milkweed is a larval host plant for Monarch, Queen and Soldier butterflies. The plant contains a milky latex that is toxic to most animals, but Monarch, Queen and Soldier caterpillars are adapted to feed on them despite the chemical defense.



Photo by Emily Bell

Flowers are born in pedicellate umbels in groups of 15–20. The corolla is reflexed and white to greenish-white with tips that may be tinged in reddish-purple. Pedicels are purplish. Leaves are long, linear and sessile. Margins may be entire or revolute. Leaves are arranged in whorls around the stem (hence the common name). Stems are thin and glabrous. Seeds are ovately flat with many fine, silky hairs (pappus) attached to their apices that aid in dispersal. They are born in smooth narrow follicles that split open as the fruit matures.

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 *verticillata* refers to the verticillate (whorled) arrangement of the leaves.

Family: Apocynaceae (Dogbane family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

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

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moderately moist to moderately dry, sandy to calcareous soils

Exposure: Full sun to minimal shade

Growth habit: 1–3' tall

Propagation: Seed

Florida regions of landscape suitability: North, Central, South

Garden tips: Whorled milkweed is suitable for a pollinator garden or wildflower meadow in moist to dry well-drained soil and flowers best in full sun. It can both reseed and spread vegetatively via rhizomes.

Caution: Whorled milkweed is considered the most toxic of all milkweeds, specifically to livestock. It should not be planted where livestock graze.

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

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