

## Asclepiadaceae milkweed family

Milkweeds are a large family of 2000 or more herbs, shrubs or vines, mostly from warm climates. Bearing simple leaves, plants may have alternate, opposite or whorled leaf arrangements. Flowers are five-merous, perfect and nearly regular. Corolla extends to a tube, its lobes inrolled. Fruits are follicles, round or linear, producing many seeds, armed with copious comas of long silky hairs. Nova Scotia has only two species of herbs.

### *Asclepias* L. milkweeds

Best developed range is in North America, with 150 species worldwide. Most are perennial herbs with opposite or alternate leaves, containing a milky latex. The corolla is deeply incised, its lobes spreading or reflexed. Flowers bear unique reproductive structures. Filaments with the anthers plus the styles are fused via a translator. Pollen is borne within a pollinium, released to visiting insects when they become entangled with the translator. Ovaries are two, the two styles united by a common stigmatic head bridging adjacent anthers.

The petalloid corona comprising five hoods, arises from near the top of the filament column around the anthers. Each hood bears a flattened horn, varying in form between species. Follicles are usually erect.

#### Key to species

- A. Hoods about equal to the stamen-style structure; horns exceeding the hoods; plants of wetlands. *Asclepias incarnata*  
aa. aa. Hoods longer than stamen-style unit; horns not longer than hoods; plants of dry disturbed soils. *A. syriaca*

### *Asclepias incarnata* L. Swamp-milkweed; asclépiade incarnate



Photo by Sean Blaney

A tall species, sparsely branched, its leaves are glabrous to pubescent and generally oblong or oblanceolate. Flowers are purple, terminal in a rounded umbel. There are two subspecies recognized. Both are thought to be here. The typical ssp. has glabrous leaves. Ssp *pulchra* (Ehrh. ex Willd.) Woodson with pubescent leaves is sympatric with the typical ssp.

Flowers in August.



*Photo by Martin Thomas*

Rocky soils along lakeshores, in marshes,, streamsidess or the edges of peatlands.

Infrequently found from Yarmouth to Cape Breton.

Ranges from NS to MB, south to NV, TX and FL.

***Asclepias syriaca* L.**

**Common Milkweed; asclépiade commune**



*Photo by Sean Blaney*

Sometimes reaching a metre or more in height, this plant also has simple stems. Leaves are ovate or oblong, 20cm long. Stems, peduncles and leaf lower surfaces are tomentose. Umbels are more numerous than in the previous species, axillary from the top leaves. Purple flowers are fragrant and borne on long pedicels.

Flowers earlier, in July.

Grows in drier, light soils.

Scattered in the centre of the province, with many collections made in the Annapolis Valley.

Scattered from NS to SK, south to MT, TX and FL; OR.



*Photo by Andy Dean*



*Photo by Sean Blaney*