

MILKWEED

Tier 3

Overview

Milkweeds contain various levels of cardiac glycoside compounds which render the plants toxic to most insects and animals. For Monarch butterfly larvae, the leaves of common milkweed provide food and protection. They can store the cardiac glycoside compounds in their tissue which renders them inedible or toxic to other animals.

The plant grows readily from seed and spreads quickly by deep rhizomes.

Habitat

Common milkweed does not tolerate excessive moisture. Most often found in sunny open areas, such as pastures, meadows, and roadsides.

Identification

This is a perennial weed, reproducing by seeds and underground rootstocks.

Stems: Downy, usually single, 90 to 120 cm tall. Underground stems.

Leaves: Opposite, large, 10-18 cm long, oval shaped, covered with fine soft hairs, and prominently veined.

Flowers: Umbels are purplish-pink and occur at the tips of stems and axils of upper leaves. Plant blooms for up to 6 weeks in early to mid-summer.

Seeds: Large spindle-shaped fruit 6-8mm, bumpy, rough and downy.

