

# Milkweeds, *Asclepias* spp.



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**Identification:** All varieties: One to five foot perennials, smooth lance or oval leaves, either alternate or whorled. Flowers in terminal or auxiliary umbels, with an inner, horn-like petal. Fruit is a follicle containing seeds with silky hairs. Milky sap in all plant parts.

**Habitat:** Roadsides, ditchbanks, pastures.

**Animals Affected:** Mainly sheep, some cattle and horses.

**Toxin Family:** Cardenolides (cardiac glycosides)

**Other:** Cardiotoxic effects include slow breathing, inability to stand, weak, rapid pulse and eventual death. Can cause acute death if eaten in large quantities. Most toxic at maturity, toxin is contained in the sap. Bitter and unpalatable unless no other forage is present. Labriform milkweed is the most poisonous, but all milkweeds should be considered toxic.