

According to the Atlas of the Vascular Flora of Louisiana, Vol. II1, there are twenty species of native wild milkweeds in Louisiana. Some are very rare, with only five or fewer specimens scattered or concentrated in different parishes over the state. Some are common and appear in nearly every parish. One common and easily cultivated species is *Asclepias perennis*. It is found in wet ditches and along sunny, wooded edges of swamps. It is a plant for moist areas and it lives a long time when happily situated.

The plants are easily grown from seeds and just as easily transplanted as the roots are fibrous. I have found it growing mostly where the moisture loving hibiscus and beardless irises grow. It doesn't grow tall; almost all the ones that I have seen were hardly over twelve inches tall. The plants are "bunchy"; that is, with several leafy stems with terminal clusters of pinky-white or whitey-pink milkweed flowers. The terminal clusters are about one inch in diameter. I have seen as few as five clusters to as many as ten clusters in bloom at once, usually in mid-June to mid-July. The leaves are smooth, long and narrow, up to four inches long and ooze milky sap when broken. It is a plant to view up close, and I have it prospering among some planted Louisiana irises.

It resembles the flower cluster of *Asclepias incarnata*, but that species grows tall, about 30 to 36 inches, with only a few clusters of blooms in the top of the plant. The leaves are much shorter than *Asclepias longifolia*, and it is much easier to grow than that species. It doesn't grow on dry, sandy roadsides as *Asclepias tuberosa* nor does it have the bright colors of that species. Look for it in wet ditches of the Delta and in other such places. It is common in the flood plains of large and small streams. It makes a pleasing addition to any garden where moisture isn't a problem before the flowering season. In some of the river bottom lands where I have seen it growing, I'm sure the soil becomes not only dry but almost cement-like. It likes full sun. It is a plant to enjoy in the wild because there is often little else in bloom at the same time. In ordinary garden soil with spring moisture, it is a true gem to grow. This is a plant that is gently elegant in a pleasing manner. Yet, when I looked in four books, *Wildflowers of Louisiana*², *Wildflowers of Mississippi*³, *Wildflowers of Arkansas*⁴, I did not find it, even in the indexes. Even Caroline Dormon, who had so much to say about all worthy wildflowers in Louisiana does not have a word to say about it. It isn't in the index to her *Flowers Native to the Deep South*.⁵ I seldom, if ever, see it listed for sale from nurseries that specialize in southern wildflowers, but I don't get many of their price lists and catalogues. I am at a loss about what little horticultural writings on this wonderful wildflower.

I know of no medical usages of this plant, but it is a superb plant for bees and butterflies, especially monarch butterflies that use milkweeds in their life cycles. I don't recall ever seeing ruby-throated hummingbirds partaking of the nectar of this plant. It may have only a good supply of pollen for the bees and other pollinators. The mechanics of the pollination of milkweeds are highly specialized works of nature. Reading the literature of this process makes the growing of milkweeds even more interesting. When enjoying the beauty of the flowering plant, you may think of the intricacies of its pollination and then appreciate even more the life cycles of plants and insects. You will observe that usually a single flower out of a cluster of twenty blossoms gets pollinated and bears seed. Such things carry one beyond the realm of just growing pretty wildflowers, and into conservation and the preservation of plants and their pollinators. The more one knows, the little he realizes that he knows, and the more he grows, the more he realizes that nature does a better job. Enjoy Nature!

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1Thomas, R. Dale & Allen, Charles M., July 1996, Atlas of the Vascular Flora of Louisiana, Vol. II, LDWF Natural Heritage Program, Baton Rouge, La.

2Brown, Clair A., 1972, Wildflowers of Louisiana and Adjoining States, LSU Press, Baton Rouge, La.

3Timmee, S. Lee, Wildflowers of Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Miss., 1989.

4Hunter, Carl G., 1992, Wildflowers of Arkansas, 3rd ed., Ozark Society Foundation, Little Rock, Ark.

5Dormon, Caroline, 1958, Flowers Native to the Deep South, Claitor's Book Store, Baton Rouge, La.