

NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS

Lindheimer Chapter

PLANT OF THE MONTH APRIL, 2013

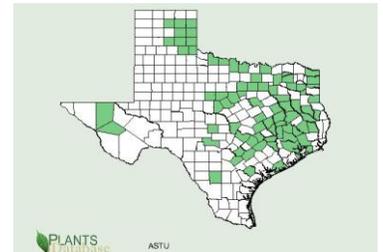
BUTTERFLY MILKWEED, *ASCLEPIAS TUBEROSA*



Butterfly Milkweed (Inset – Monarch Caterpillar)



Monarch Butterfly



USDA Range Map: Texas

Butterfly Milkweed is a showy perennial flower, growing 1½ to 2' tall. It is quite widespread, occurring from Central Texas east to the Atlantic coast, and from Canada south to Florida. From late spring to early fall it has bright orange flowers in clusters that can be 2" to 5" across. Its narrow, dark green leaves provide a nice contrast to the flowers.

Butterflies love to nectar on the flowers, but its most important trait is that as host plant for the Monarch and other 'milkweed butterflies.' Like other plants in the milkweed family, Butterfly Milkweed contains certain chemicals called glycosides. These are poisonous to most animals, but the monarch caterpillars can ingest them without harm. By absorbing the glycosides, the monarch caterpillar and butterfly also become distasteful and toxic to their predators. The distinctive colors of the monarch serve as a warning – "Do Not Eat!"

As might be expected, the glycosides in the Butterfly Milkweed also make it distasteful to deer. However, aphids usually are attracted to this plant. These can be removed with a strong stream of water, spraying with soapy water, or just allowing the lady bugs take care of them.

A similar plant, Tropical Milkweed (*Asclepias currasavica*), is frequently found in nurseries. While it too can be a Monarch host plant, it is native to the tropics of the Western Hemisphere.

Note: Butterfly Milkweed is a NPSOT NICE!™ selection for Spring 2013.