

## Germinating, Growing and Transplanting Milkweed Seeds

For best results stratify the seed by placing in the refrigerator for a month or more before planting. Milkweed seedlings can be started indoors in a greenhouse or under artificial lighting and then transplanted outdoors after the last frost. If seeds are started indoors, allow 4-8 weeks growing time before transplanting. A plastic mini flat can be used to start the seeds. Fill the flats with a dampened potting mix suitable for seedlings. Surface sow the seeds in mini rows; they need light for germination, but you can sprinkle a little vermiculite on top. Gently mist the soil surface with warm water to dampen the vermiculite that has been added. In an effort to improve germination rates, many gardeners place the seeds in packets made from paper towels and soak them in warm water for 24 hours prior to planting. After sowing, place the mini flat in a plastic bag to keep the seeds from drying out while germinating. Most seeds will germinate in 2-4 weeks if the flats are maintained at 75°F. After germination, remove the plastic covering and bottom water when needed. Do not overwater.

Transplant to 6 packs when they have at least two sets of leaves. Before transplanting outdoors, acclimatize the plants to outdoor conditions for a few days by placing them in a sheltered location during the day and then bringing them indoors at night. Add mulch around the seedlings soon after planting. The mulch holds in the moisture and minimizes the growth of competing weeds. The seedlings should be fertilized 2-3 times during the growing season if using water-soluble fertilizer or once a season if you utilize a granulated time-release formulation.

### Thinning

When small seeds are sown, they are often mixed with sand or fine soil to have better seed distribution. However, this method does not completely prevent crowding of seedlings and thinning will be necessary. Thinning provides more space between plants, increasing the amount of light reaching the plants and the air circulation around them. Seedlings may need to be thinned several times beginning 1-2 weeks after germination. Without proper thinning, you will end up with weaker plants.

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### ***Asclepias syriaca*** - Common Milkweed

Rhizomatous spreader. Grows in full sun and tolerates dry and poor soil conditions; best planted where you don't mind having a LOT of it! Fields, wild spots – do not plant in your perennial border because it will compete successfully with all the other plants. 6' tall x 2' wide at maturity. Plant seedlings two feet apart.

### ***Asclepias incarnata*** – Swamp Milkweed, Rose Milkweed

A fine plant for the perennial garden – not invasive. Likes regular irrigation and can grow in the wild in a low spot that will collect moisture. Does not need to grow in a swamp! Plant seedlings 18" apart in full sun with regular watering. 4' tall x 15" wide at maturity.

### ***Asclepias tuberosa*** – Tuberous Milkweed, Butterfly Weed.

A good choice for sunny, hot, well-drained sandy sites. Native from Maine to the deep south, so tolerates hot, dry conditions. In Maine, choose a protected site for maximum warmth. Plant seedlings 12" apart in full sun in well-drained soil. 24-28" tall x 12" wide at maturity.