

A citizen science project to track milkweed specialists in Michigan

In summer 2020, Michigan State University Extension is initiating the [summer milkweed search](#), a project to document milkweeds and their specialist insects across the state. We are interested in the public's help to estimate population sizes for specialist insects of milkweed. Anyone is welcome to participate in the project by reporting milkweeds in their own gardens or public spaces and any milkweed specialist visitors.. Participating in this project will involve the following steps:

- Record the total number and type of milkweed plants in a home garden or public space
- Scan milkweed plants for 1 minute in search of 3 milkweed specialist insects
- Report data on milkweeds and specialist insects using the [following online survey](#).

Local-level data can inform gardeners and municipalities of existing successes in providing suitable habitat and the need to plant additional milkweeds. Knowing when and where these specialist insects are found will provide baseline information on the population sizes of each insect. If you are interest to support monarchs and other milkweed specialists, multiple resources exist on [how to plant milkweeds](#). During Fall, the summer milkweed search team will identify results and summarize the results about milkweed populations and the number of milkweed specialist insects in different regions of Michigan.

The milkweed plants for the summer milkweed search



Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)– Grows 4-6 feet tall with stalks of flowers.

Photo credit: Duke Elsner, MSU Extension



Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) – Bushy plant up to 2 feet tall with orange flowers. Photo credit: Duke Elsner, MSU Extension



Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) – Plants grow 2-4 feet tall with pink/purple flowers on narrow leaves. Photo credit: David Cappaert, MSU, Bugwood.org



Whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*) – Plants grow $\frac{1}{2}$ - 2 feet tall with whorls of 4-6 leaves along the central stem. Each floral cluster = has 7-20 individual white flowers. Photo credit: peganum CC-BY-SA 2.0



Poke milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*) - Plants grow 2-6 feet tall. Green or pale purple petals hang downward on this less common species. Photo credit: University of Wisconsin Extension.

The milkweed specialists



Red milkweed beetle



Large milkweed bug



Monarch caterpillar