



Butterfly Milkweed - *Asclepias tuberosa*

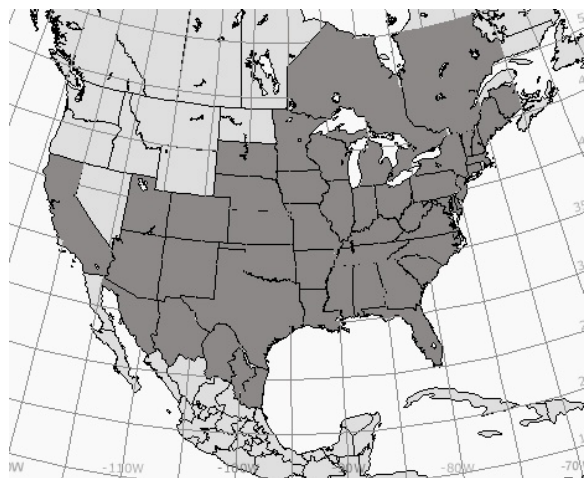
More than anything, I must have flowers, always, always.

~ Claude Monet

Flower color:
Flaming Tangerine orange

A selection of the common names used throughout the country:

Pleurisy Root;
Chigger Weed;
Butterfly Weed;
Burning Bush;
Railroad Annie;
Silkweed; Archangel;
Yellow Milkweed;
Orange Swallowwort;
Indian-Bokay;
Indian Paint;
Indian-Plume;
Indian Posy;
Indian Paint Brush;
Canada Root; Pleasing Root;
Rubber Root;
Wind Root; Colic Root;
White Root; Orange Root;
Tuber Root; Flux Root; Fly catcher



While the majority of *Asclepias* species (50+) have opposite foliage, 6 clearly have alternate foliage: *Asclepias cutleri*, *engelmanniana*, *hirtella*, *stenophylla*, *tuberosa* and *viridis*.

BLOSSOM:

 Orange Blossom Special:

Flower clusters arise at the top of the very hairy stems. Each cluster is relatively flat, with up to 25 individually stalked flowers, each less than an inch long. The flower color is typically brilliant orange, but also ranges from pale yellow to deep reddish-orange. Bloom time April to September depending on location.

It is striking, flamboyant and one of our hardiest plants.

Transcontinental Journey:

Grows across North America from Canada to Mexico

Tuberosa refers to swellings on the roots or *tubers*.

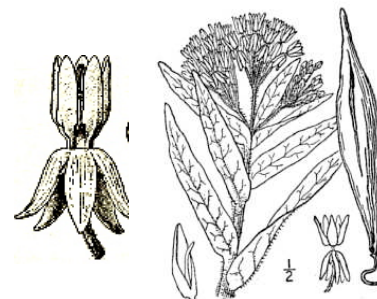
US Range:

41 states, plus DC:
AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, NC, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, VT, WI, WV

A *chigger* (for the uninitiated) is an orange-colored biting mite.

Give me one good reason why: *Asclepias tuberosa* has one basic difference to other *Asclepias* species: its latex is watery clear, not milky....

...a milk-less milk-weed.



(1) drawings: botanicus.org
(2) <http://plants.usda.gov>

Canada Range:

2 provinces: Ontario, Quebec

HABITAT: Dirt poor:

Its habitat is usually in well-drained prairies, open savannas, sandy or gravelly sites, dry/rocky open woods, glades and fields. It flourishes in full sun or light shade and in hay fields that have not been herbicided. It may be seen along roadsides and in woodland margins, thus well adapted to poor soil.

1985 ~ NC Wildflower of the Year

Mexico Range:

5 states: Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora and Tamaulipas

LEAVES: Abundant **alternately** arranged leaves are roughly 4" long and 1" wide; dagger-like blades. Once established, this native perennial's foliage becomes thicker each year.


PODS: Follicles erect on a deflexed pedicel (*FEDP*). Its twin, upward pointing, spindle-shaped pods mature in late summer. They are 4-6" long and less than an inch thick. They are smooth and usually covered in fine, downy hairs. Seeds are dispersed by the wind on silky tufts.

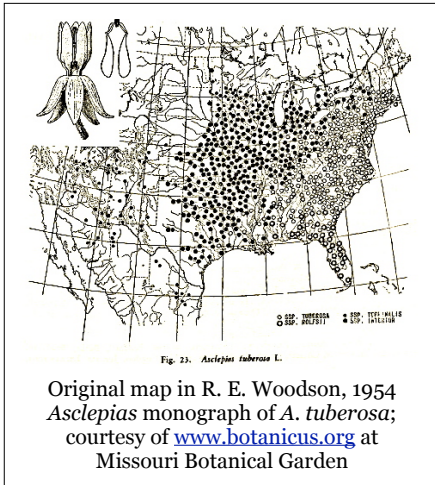
Elevations: Sea level to 8000', depending on location

Common names in Mexico: Escoranilla, Oreja de conejo Tlalacxoyatl, (English translation: *Immortal*); In Coahuila, it is called Desconocido

Cohen and Brower (1983) reported that *A. tuberosa* is low in cardenolides.

A natural history/meditation from “Monarchs and Milkweeds Almanac” by Ina Warren

 *They're blowin' in the wind:* It has been determined to have roughly 6,400 seeds per ounce!



(*Personal note:* I patronize only nurseries that do not bash their customers who consciously add to their native plant collections the friendly, non-native species and heirloom family favorites that also provide life-giving nectars to our imperiled pollinators, specifically seedless varieties of the *Buddleja* Butterfly Bush.)

My World's - Fair Lady:

Asclepias tuberosa caused quite a stir in Philadelphia at the US Centennial Exhibition in 1876. The specimens had been grown in Holland and shipped to the US for the exhibit. Mrs. William Starr Dana remarked 20 years later, “*Truly flowers, like prophets are without honor in their own country.*”

Like cures like?:

A. tuberosa was listed in the 1820-1905 editions of the US Pharmacopoeia as well as the National Formulary for 20 years from 1916-1936. Some journals reference it as having active action against tuberculosis. *Tuber-osa* vs. *tuber-culosis*?



Drawing from *American Medical Botany* by Jacob Bigelow (1818)

While most milkweeds are disease and pest free, crown rot, rust and leaf spot can be a problem if in wet or poorly drained soils.




Nobody moves, nobody dies:

If plants **MUST** be dug (rescued from a bulldozer path, etc), moved or divided, it is best to transplant them either in the winter when the deep knobby roots are dormant or in the early spring while the shoots are small. Only in plant rescue operations due to habitat destruction should they be transplanted when flowering. Most of them die from the shock of transplant.

Lead us not into temptation:

Instead of digging plants from the wild, it is **ALWAYS** better to support native plant nurseries by purchasing their nursery-grown container plants.

 Oh, I wish I were
Asclepias tuberosa
That's the flower I'd truly
love to be
For if I were *Asclepias tuberosa*
Butterflies would be
in love with me !

(in your best
Oscar Mayer® Wiener voice)



Consumption be done about it?:

Its common name pleurisy root came about as it was said to treat inflammation of the pleura (lining of the lungs). It was thought to be an effective expectorant. Sir Ghillean T. Prance, Director emeritus of Kew Botanic Gardens wrote that it is “*one of the most cited plants in books about the medicines of North American Indians.*”

You had me at yello:

According to Marie Harrison in *Gardening in the Coastal South*, butterfly weed “*has an iron constitution. It withstands the heat and drought of July, the wind and saltwater blown in by storms, and repeated defoliation by monarch butterfly caterpillars. In spite of all that nature can dish out, it blooms orange, yellow or red blossoms during the hottest part of summer.*”



Lovely plantings of Butterfly Milkweed in the collections of the U. S. Botanic Gardens' Monarch Waystation in Washington, DC.