

Purple Milkweed *Asclepias Purpurascens*

Plant Type: Native Perennial Wildflower

Sun Exposure: Sun, Part Sun

Season of Interest: Summer, Fall

Bloom Time: Summer

Bloom Color: Deep Purple

Height: 24 to 36 in.

Spread: 12 to 28 in.

Spacing: 32 in.

Water Needs: Average

Maintenance: Very Little

Soil Type: Clay, Loam, Sandy, Rocky

Soil pH: Acidic, Neutral

Soil Drainage: Well drained, Moist

Pests: Aphids

Diseases: None

Wildlife: Bees, Butterflies



Description: Purple Milkweed is a native perennial listed as threatened in several states, and as a species of special concern in Tennessee. Though it is widely distributed throughout the eastern half of North America; it rarely grows in large colonies like other milkweeds. Preferred habitat includes full to part sun on sandy soils of prairies, shrub thickets, shores, and dry open woodlands. It has also been found growing in wet prairies and calcium rich sites. Research has shown it to have high nutrient requirements.



Purple milkweed has very distinctive flowers whose nectar attracts long-tongued bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators. There are 5 rose pink petals with hoods that are connected at the base below the anther column. The horns are down curved and purplish white. These flower parts are highly modified for insect pollination. Oppositely arranged leaves are pubescent and dark green adaxially and densely pubescent and light green abaxially. Characteristics that help to distinguish it from the common milkweed include a more prominent veins than common milkweed and flower clusters that form primarily in the upper part of the plant. Like other milkweeds, this plant produces a bitter tasting and potentially irritating white latex sap that contains toxic glycosides. For more information see: plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/asclepias-purpurascens .

Care and Growing Tips: This milkweed is thought to be adaptable to a wide range of growing conditions, but this seems unlikely considering this milkweed is a rare find in the wild. Since *Asclepias purpurascens* does not have a long tap root to store excess nutrients, reports of drought tolerance are questionable. My plants are planted in well-drained soil but it's not overly dry. I mixed in composted manure before planting. They receive morning and late afternoon sun but get a shady reprieve from the sizzling mid-day sun. Under these conditions I have been successful growing this milkweed in East Tennessee. However, since purple milkweed seems more difficult to establish, consider putting up a fence to keep away small critters. At mid season after the blooms have faded, cut some common stems back by about a third. This promotes fresh plant growth and could get you an extra generation of monarchs on the fresh new leaves. Leave some plants uncut if you want to harvest milkweed seeds in fall.