



Step-By-Step Guide for Milkweed Seed Collection



MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Brown paper bag
- Writing utensil
- Scissors

NOTE:

Make sure you get permission to collect seeds if you are collecting milkweed seeds from somewhere other than your own yard. Collection should take place between late August to early October for viable seeds.

1. Identify a milkweed plant

Use the photos below to identify commonly found species - otherwise go to inaturalist.com or the SEEK app to scan a photo of your found species to help identify the plant. Avoid any pods attached to “vine-like” plants as this is likely an invasive plant called swallowwort.

2. Check for pod maturity

In each species of milkweed, mature pods are generally elongated cones with a light to dark brown color and a leathery texture. Gently press along the seam of a pod, if it cracks open, the seeds are ready for collection. Do not collect from pods that are covered in insects.

3. 20% rule

Best guidance is to collect a few pods and leave more than you collect. For plants in native habitats, the guideline is to collect no more than 20% of the seeds from any single plant. This ensures there is plenty of seed remaining for wildlife and plant species reproduction.

4. Harvesting

If a pod opens easily, pull out the central seed/floss “rib” as one piece. Pinch near the top and slide your fingers down to strip seeds off; you’ll be left with a ribbon of floss. Try not to pull on the plant or pull off pods without scissors, as this may harm the plant. You can also tie a mesh bag or stocking over the pods so they can pop naturally inside the netting. If a pod is already opened and is insect free, take a paper bag and a few coins and place the floss in the bag. Shake the bag until the seeds are free from the floss, then cut a small hole in a bottom corner of the bag to pour out the seeds into your collection bag.

» *Note: If you have difficulty separating the seeds from the pods, you can collect the full pods using scissors and drop them off in the bins*

5. Dropping off seeds

All milkweed seeds/pods need to be placed in a brown paper bag and labeled with the species name (swamp/common or butterfly), if known, and date of collection before placing in either of the bins at Wint Nature Center or Red Oaks Nature Center. Brown paper bags can be found attached to each of the collections bins, if needed.



Swamp Milkweed

Asclepias incarnata

Swamp milkweed plants have white, milky sap. Leaves are 2-4 inches long, opposite and egg-shaped, with long stalks and shallow tooth edges. Flowers on this species are dark pink to purple and grow in clusters. It is commonly found in wet areas. In the late summer to fall, light-brown, elongated pods appear on the plant. These pods contain small brown seeds encapsulated in a white fluff.



Common Milkweed

Asclepis syrica

Common milkweed plants have broad, oval-shaped leaves and stout stems that secrete milky white sap when damaged. They typically grow in sunny areas. The flowers range from pink to purple in large clusters. In late summer to fall, greenish-white cone-shaped pods form that contain brown seeds encapsulated in white floss.



Butterfly Milkweed

Asclepis syrica

Butterfly milkweed plants have long elongated leaves with bright orange flower clusters. They typically grow in full sun to partial shade and very dry to average soil moisture. In the late summer to fall, long green/brown pods pop up and break open to reveal brownish seeds encapsulated in white floss.

