



### Milkweed seed collection:

1. Milkweed pods mature in September and October. Harvest milkweed seeds when pods turn gray or brown and split open on their own with brown seeds inside. Harvest seeds soon because wind may take the seed out of the pods before seeds can be collected.

Common milkweed



Photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service

Swamp milkweed



Photo: Monarch Watch

Butterfly milkweed



Photo: Monarch Watch

Whorled milkweed



Photo: Prairie Moon

2. Place the seed pods in small paper lunch bags or larger paper grocery bags. Plastic buckets can be used. Allow the seed to dry in paper grocery bags. Do not use plastic sacks because the seed often gets moldy when stored in plastic sacks.
3. Collect only one species of milkweed in each container and label the container according to species. Most seeds collected will likely be common milkweed.

### Processing milkweed seeds:

1. Separating seed from fluffy floss (coma) can be done by hand indoors later in the fall or winter, but it can be a messy job. If you have time when harvesting, seeds can be separated from floss (coma) and pods while in the field. Cleaning seeds that way may also leave some seeds outdoors to grow more milkweed plants.
2. While it is best to separate seed from the floss outdoors (if possible), a cordless hand vacuum can be used to control the white fluffy floss that may become airborne.
3. Avoid getting milkweed sap into eyes and encourage hand washing following any activity where skin is exposed to the sticky milkweed sap that contains cardiac glycosides.
4. When the seed is dry, store seed in containers in a refrigerator. Label each container with the species and date collected.

## **Milkweed Cold, Moist Stratification Process:**

Seeds must be cold stratified before planting in the spring. For best results, seeds need to be in the cold, moist environment for at least 3 weeks and can be kept in a refrigerator for a year or more before planting.

### **Materials:**

1 cup vermiculite or sand (less vermiculite can be used if you have fewer seeds)

¼ oz milkweed seeds (approx. 1000 common or 1500 swamp milkweed seeds)

85 ml water or (about 1/3 cup)

Plastic bag or container that can be sealed. Containers as small as micro centrifuge tubes can be used (holds 5 seeds and a small amount of vermiculite) to hand out at events.

1. Add vermiculite and seeds to a container.
2. Add water and pour off excess.  
Should hold as much water as possible, but not be able to pour any water out.
3. Close container and label with the date and species of milkweed.
4. Leave container with seed and vermiculite in refrigerator for a minimum of 3 weeks.

## **Milkweed Seed Germination\*:**

1. After a minimum of 3 weeks, take seeds out of the refrigerator.
2. Leave in the container at room temperature (not direct sunlight).
3. Seed germination will occur in 10-12 days.
4. To protect the roots, plant seeds shortly after germination.

\*This part of the process can be skipped if seeds are planted directly in pots or sowed on the ground. This process reduces potting soil used because only germinated seeds are planted.

## **Milkweed Seed Planting:**

1. Fill a container (planting inserts, pots, cups) with potting mix without packing the potting mix.
2. Once the mix is in the container, make hole with a pen or pencil in each cell or container.
3. If planting seeds, place seed about ¼ inch deep in the potting mix.  
If planting germinated seeds, place seedling so root is covered and seed leaves are exposed.
4. Pinch the dirt so that a little well is formed to hold water.
5. Saturate potting soil with water and repeat once or twice daily.
6. Seedlings can be transplanted into larger containers or planted directly in the ground.
7. If plants are grown inside, it is recommended that plants go through an “hardening period” by placing plants in a shady location outside to get plants accustomed to the outdoor conditions before planting in the ground.
8. When planting outside, plant milkweed plants in direct sunlight and water frequently until roots are established.

**For more information contact: Lynne Campbell at [lynnec@iastate.edu](mailto:lynnec@iastate.edu)**