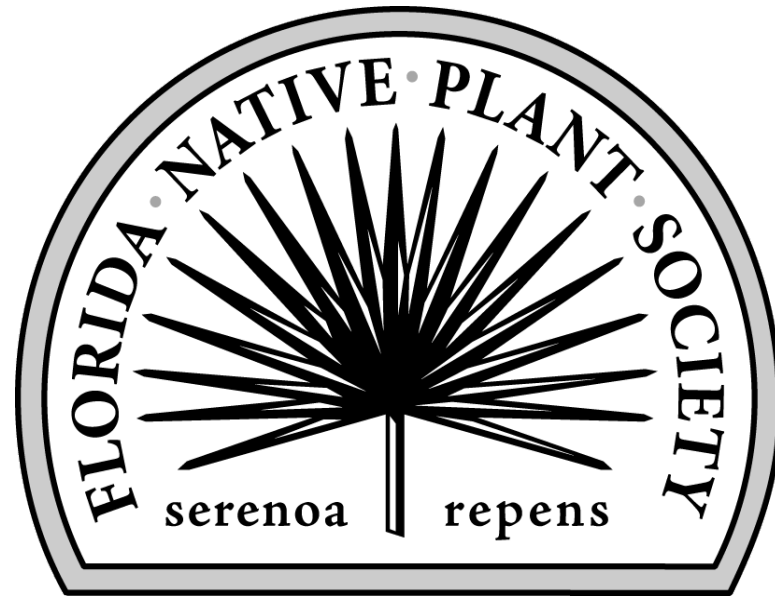


# Florida Native Plant Society



Native Plant Owners Manual

*Asclepias humistrata* – Sandhill Milkweed

Mark Hutchinson

# For Your Information

All date and seasonal references are applicable to the eastern panhandle of Hernando County where the plants portrayed in this presentation grow, and this manual was created. This area happens to be a cold spot in central Florida due to the Brooksville Ridge and approximates a Hardiness Zone of 8a or 8b, average annual low temperatures ranging between 10 and 20 °F.

Please note that any reference to medicinal or culinary use of plants or plant parts should in no way be considered an endorsement by the Florida Native Plant Society of any sort of experimentation or consumptive use.

Please do not attempt to rescue any native plants without first reviewing the [FNPS Policy on Transplanting Native Plants](#)

Feedback is welcome: [mhutchinson10@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:mhutchinson10@tampabay.rr.com)

# Sandhill Milkweed



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*Asclepias humistrata*



**Pinewoods Milkweed**, sandhill milkweed,  
purple milkweed, pink-veined milkweed,  
creeping milkweed

*Asclepias* (ass - KLE - pee - us)

Named for Asklepios, the god  
of medicine and healing in Greek  
mythology

*humistrata* (hew - mi - STRAY - tuh)

From the Latin '*humis*,'  
meaning ground, and '*sternere*,' to  
spread, referring to low sprawling  
nature



# Biological and Genetic Relationships

*Asclepias humistrata* - Walter - pinewoods milkweed

└─ *Asclepias* L. - milkweed

└─ Apocynaceae (milkweed family)

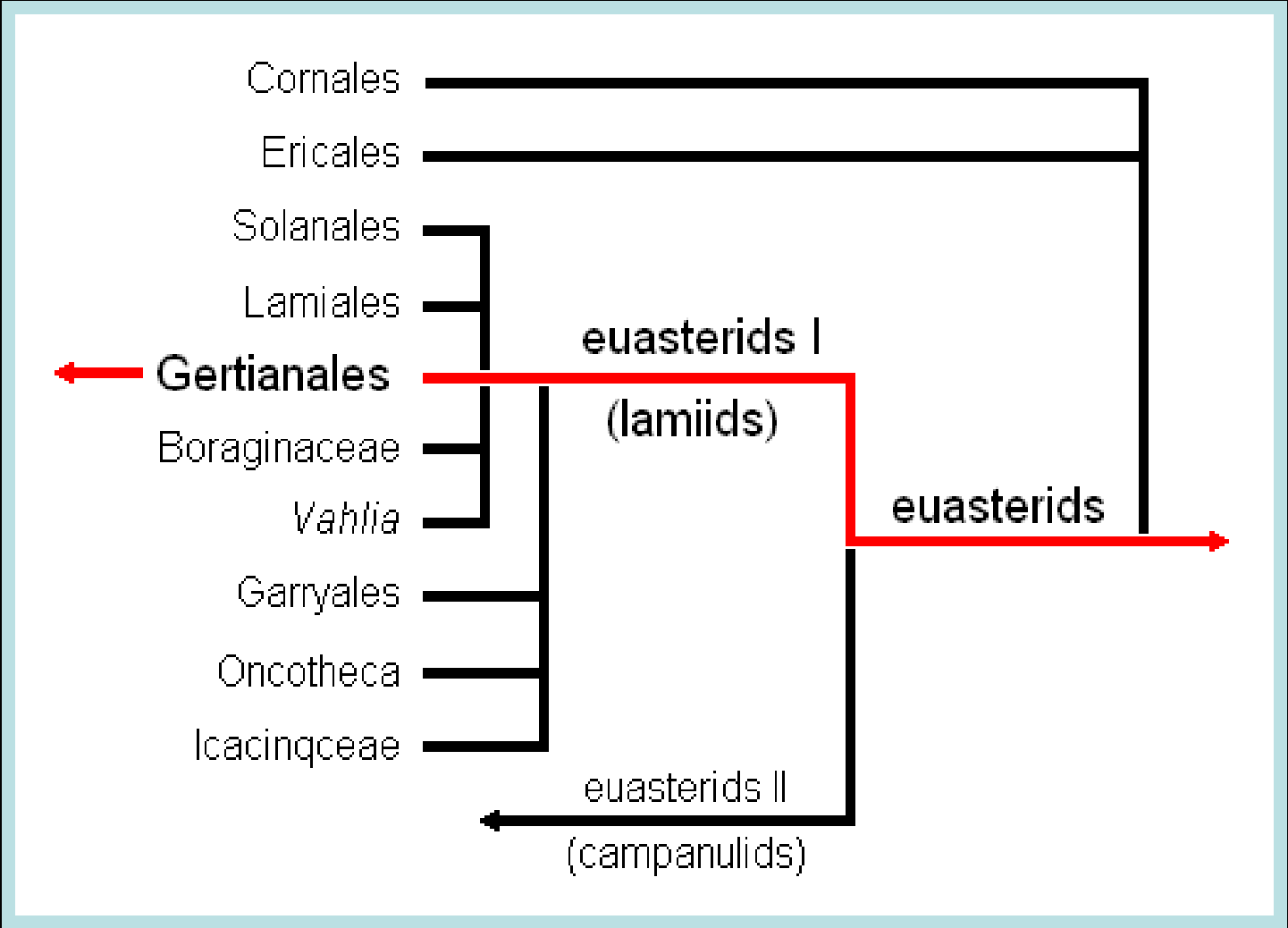
Loganiaceae

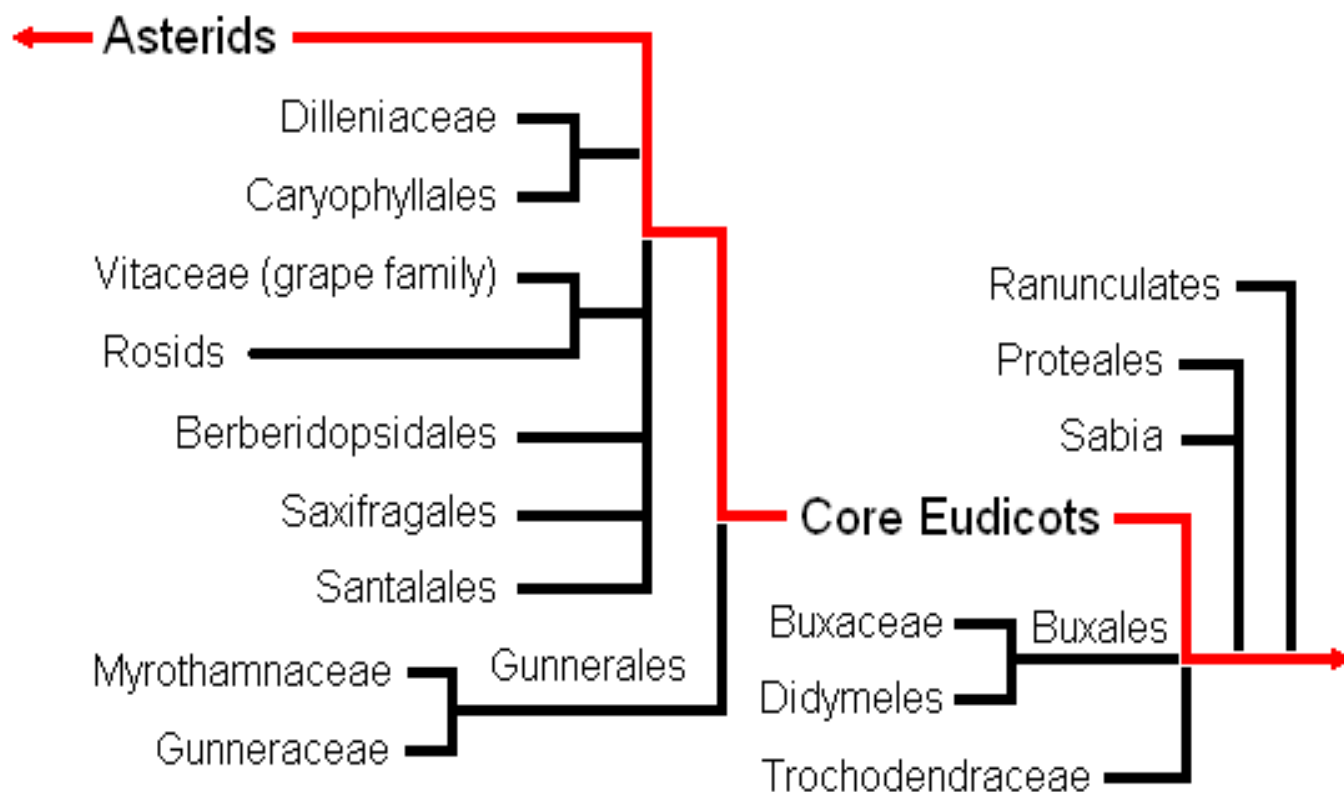
Gentianaceae (gentian family)

Gelsemiaceae

Rubiaceae (coffee family)

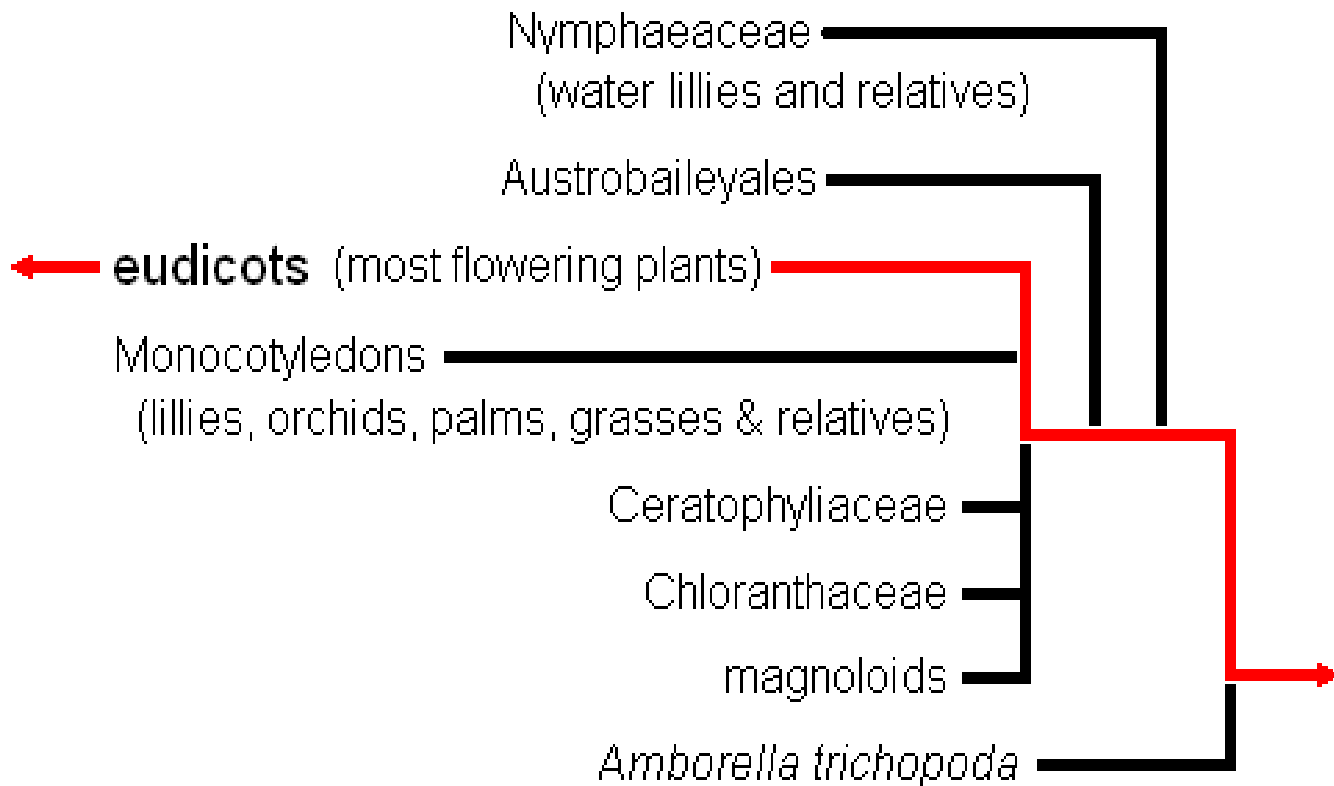
Each species is a leaf on the Tree of Life. Its genetic connections can be explored by following the branches (red line), towards the roots of life.



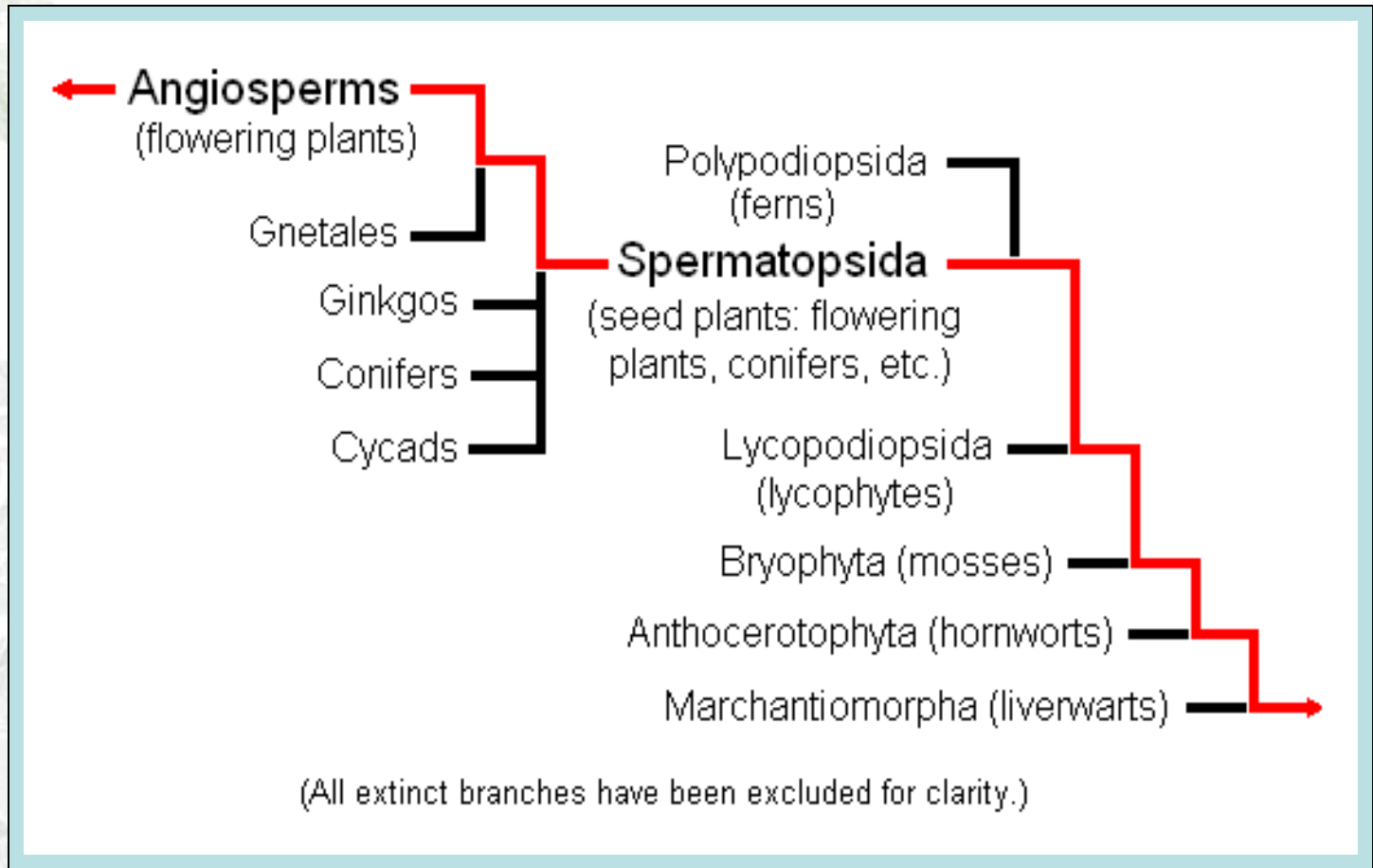


(All extinct branches have been excluded for clarity.)





(Individual species and genus denoted by italics)



There is still more to go, follow this link to explore more of the University of Arizona's [Tree of Life](#).



- The United States Department of Agriculture, NRCS, lists a total of sixty-six species of the genus *Asclepias* L. throughout the U.S.
- The Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants identifies 22 species occurring in Florida, 21 of which are native.

R.K. Godfrey Herbarium (FSU)  
#178692 Pasco Co.,  
10/14/1980

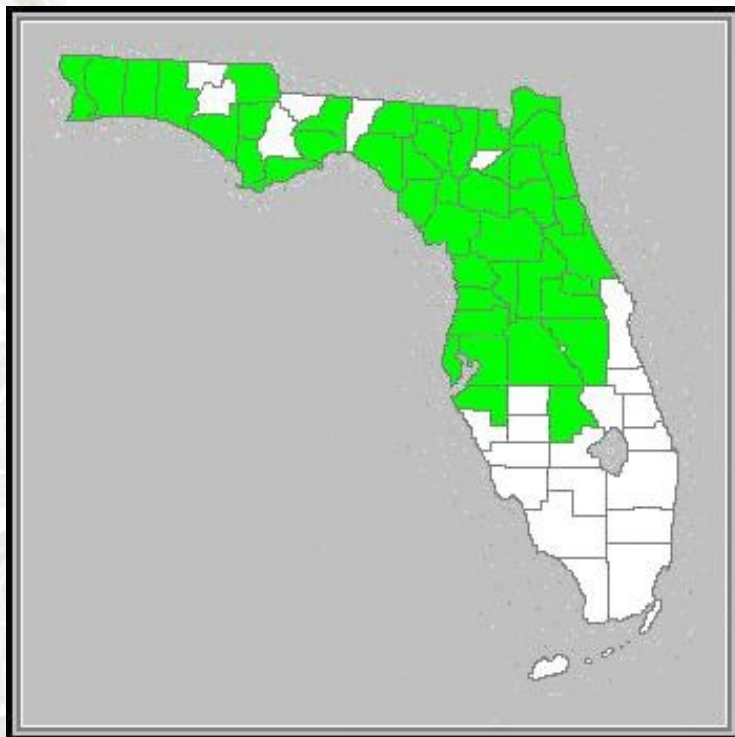
# Species Distribution in North America



(For specific distribution within any of the shaded areas go to the USDA link provided on the reference page, and click the shaded area of interest.)

Sandhill Milkweed, native to North America, is endemic to the southeastern United States from a couple of parishes in eastern Louisiana to a few counties in southern North Carolina.

# Species Distribution within Florida



( \*vouchered – indicates that a fully documented dried specimen has been deposited in an approved herbarium)

- A herbaceous perennial native to central Florida and the panhandle, Pinewoods Milkweed is \*vouchered in approximately forty-five Florida counties.
- *Asclepias humistrata* prefers Sandy Flat Pine Woods, Sandhill, and Scrub habitats.

# Growing Conditions



to



• Full sun to slight shade

- *A. humistrata* prefers well-drained sandy soil.
- Acid to slightly alkaline soil – 5.1 to 7.5pH
- Good drought tolerance
- Hardiness: USDA Zone 3a: to -39.9 °C (-40 °F)  
to USDA Zone 8b: to -9.4 °C (15 °F)
- Flowering and seed production occur between April and June
- Height: 18-24 inch (45-60 cm)

# Plant Structure and Life Cycle



When this herbaceous perennial first emerges after winter, it is readily recognizable by the prominently veined elliptical to ovate opposing leaves.

This is a larval host plant and is oftentimes devoured at this tender stage. The resulting caterpillars and butterfly may be protected by the milkweed's chemistry.



Purple Milkweed is normally found in sandhill and scrub habitats, areas susceptible to wildfire. During a fire, most of the low laying plant life and ground cover will be burnt away. The plant has evolved a thick tap root system that runs deep, aiding in rapid recovery from fire. Depending on its age, a typical taproot may run as deep as 12 inches and be an inch in diameter.



As the plant matures, the soft green color of its leaves darkens to a purple/green-to-mauve color, while the ovate shaped leaves develop an acute tip.







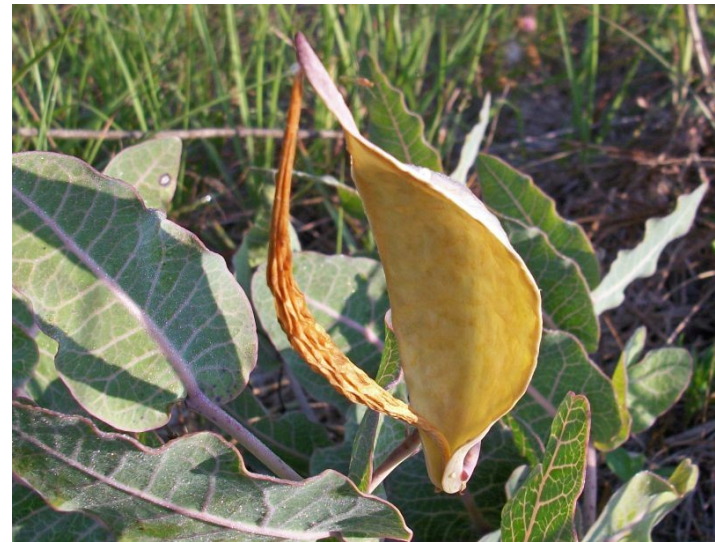
The white-to-lavender colored hermaphroditic flowers attract many pollinators: butterflies, wasps, and shield bugs. Pollination in this genus is unusual; pollen is contained in sacs stored in the slits of the flower, as pollinators walk across the flower head these sacs attach to the feet or mouth parts of the creature, being pulled free as the insect moves. Pollination is achieved by reversing this process on the next plant visited.

Pollination results in follicles, the erect fruit on drooping pedicels which form in late May and early June. The follicles remain closed until the seeds are mature.





As the follicle dries and splits, the membrane holding the seeds arches out, exposing them to the sun and wind. Drying releases white silky pappus that aid the wind in seed dispersal.





# Pollinators and Wildlife



*Asclepias humistrata* is host plant to both the Monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus* (see picture), and the Queen butterfly, *Danaus gilippus*. It is believed that the caterpillar and the butterfly that follows may be protected by the milkweed chemicals absorb while feeding.

# Seed Collecting and Propagation

Seeds can be collected easily by placing a mesh bag (like those garlic is sold in), over the follicle before it opens and while it is still attached to the plant. Take care not to break the follicle or damage the plant. These seeds should be scarified by lightly rubbing them on fine sand paper prior to sowing in the late fall or early spring.

Root cuttings can be taken in the the fall and early spring. Exposed root flesh should be dusted with rooting hormone and placed in very sandy soil. Keep moist, but not wet, in full sun.



# Presentation References

- Biological and genetic relationships

University of Arizona [Tree of Life](#)

- North American distribution

[USDA](#) - Natural Resource Conservation Service

- Florida distribution

[Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants](#)

- Herbarium specimen

R.K. Godfrey [Herbarium](#) (FSU)

- Larval Food Source – Host Plants

[Biospherenursery.com](#)

# Presentation References (cont.)

- Growing conditions and general information

[Wikipedia](#) genus *Asclepias*

[The Wildflower Center](#) UTA

- FNPS – Plants in your area

[FNPS.org](#) This Link will take you to a map of Florida. Click your county on the map to see if Pinewoods Milkweed can be found there.

- [Florida Plants](#) by zone and habitat, use your county name or zip-code to see native habitat classifications and appropriate plants.

- For more in-depth study:

*Native Florida Plants: Low Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening.* Robert G. Haehle and Joan Brookwell. 2004 (revised edition). Taylor Trade Publishing. ISBN 1589790510.

*A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants.* Rufino Osorio. 2001. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. ISBN 0813018528.

*Grafting, Budding, Cutting, Layering & Other Ways of Propagating Fruit Plants in Florida.* 1995. Gainesville: Institute of Food & Agricultural Science. ISBN 0916287092.