

Featured Pest: Showy Milkweed and Common Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa* and *Asclepias syriaca*)

Native to North America both Showy and Common Milkweeds are commonly found in pastures, along roadsides, waste spaces, right-of-ways, untended areas, field edges and cultivated crops.

Biology: Perennials with creeping roots capable of spreading by both roots as well as by airborne seeds. New shoots emerging from rootstocks will not have cotyledons while seedlings from seed will have oval cotyledons. Stems and leaves exude a milky latex sap when cut or crushed.

Identification: The flowers are reddish, purplish to occasionally white and form distinctive large ball-like clusters known as umbellate cymes at the top of the plant. Seeds are borne in pods known as follicles. The follicles split at maturity on one side to release seeds tufted with silky hairs. The leaves of Showy Milkweed are broad and oval versus elliptic for Common Milkweed. Showy Milkweed can be distinguished by the densely woolly flower stalks and it has fewer and larger flowers than Common Milkweed. Showy Milkweed seed pods are 6 to 10 cm long versus Common Milkweed pods at 5 to 8 cm.



Figure 1. Flowers of Showy Milkweed

Scouting Tips: Milkweed will establish in disturbed sites and is favoured by moist soils common to ditches, roadsides, stream banks, fence lines and low lying areas. Milkweeds tend to be patchy so scouting needs to cover sufficient ground to find all plants. Early in the season foliar growth will be slow so scout areas with known infestations by looking within the plant canopy for plants hiding out of sight. Watch for seedlings in areas surrounding patches that have been known to have reached seed maturity.

Control Tips: The perennial nature of the weed with a spreading root system and wind borne seeds makes control difficult and ineffective if re-infestation occurs from areas difficult to control with herbicide, tillage or mowing. Tillage is effective in restricting spread of colonies by roots and eliminating seedlings but it can spread root segments and lead to new infestations if equipment is not properly cleaned between sites. Mowing prior to seed maturity will reduce spread by seed. Herbicide control is essential to obtain control of milkweeds and preventing new infestations. Herbicide applications on larger plants with a systemic herbicide should be targeted when plants are at the bud stage.

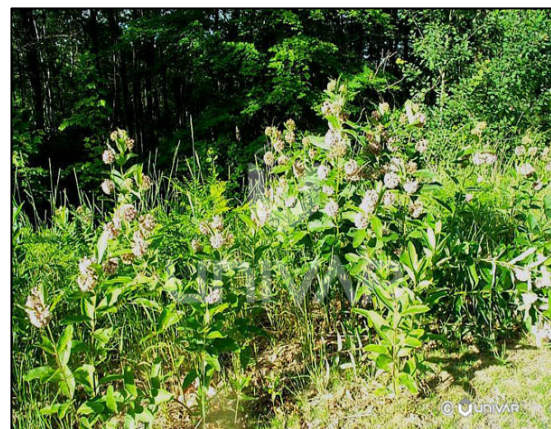


Figure 2. Common Milkweed

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Weed Act Status: Common milkweed is regulated in Nova Scotia. Common Milkweed is listed as a noxious weed in Quebec and Manitoba. Showy Milkweed is listed as a noxious weed in Manitoba and is a non-regulated nuisance weed in British Columbia. All milkweeds are somewhat unpalatable to livestock and toxic to varied extents. Showy milkweed is toxic to livestock in both the fresh and dry form so grazing and haying of infested areas can lead to problems.



Figure 3. Follicles and leaves of Common Milkweed

Similar Weeds: Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*): is found from Manitoba eastward in ditches, swamps and marshy areas. The leaves lack a woolly undersurface and are narrower and longer than Common or Showy Milkweed.

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