

Starting Milkweed from Seed

If you've ever wanted to try starting your own milkweed from seed, you could have scattered seeds in your garden in Fall, hoping that some would emerge in Spring, or you can try starting seeds inside your home to plant when the soil is warmer and the danger of frost has passed.

Here's what you'll need:

- ☼ **Seeds—from packets or saved**
- ☼ **Paper towel**
- ☼ **Plastic bags**

That's it? Yep. Let's get started. It's all about what milkweed needs to germinate. The seeds need to be damp and cold for a good, long time. Then, they need light to germinate.

Dampen a paper towel and place the seeds on the towel. Fold the towel over and place the towel with seeds into a baggie. Place the baggie into your refrigerator! Yes. Remember, you are tricking the seeds into thinking that they are outside lying on the wet ground.

When you've put them in the fridge, go to your calendar and mark the day that your seeds went into the refrigerator.

Then calculate 6-8 weeks. That means that if you put the seeds in the fridge on the 1st of Feb, you'll be taking them out between March 6th and 21st. Mark that on your calendar so that you don't forget!



Just one of several varieties available in seed at the Grange (*asclepias tuberosa*)



Remember:

- **Place seeds in damp towels**
- **Place in baggie in the fridge**
- **Mark your calendar!**

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Starting Milkweed Seeds

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In 6-8 weeks we will remove the seeds and *gently press them* into prepared **Seed Starting Mix** in small 6-packs.

You can get clean and sterile 6-packs at places like Buy-Mart and the Grange in the garden section right now. Why **Seed Starting Mix**? Simple. It's sterile. Never use garden soil or even potting soil. You do not want to introduce any pathogens to these tiny seedlings.

Notice that I said "*Gently press*" into the soil. That's the second trick. *Milkweed seeds need to have light to germinate.*

I put the little guys in their 6-packs on a heated "seed mat" and give them 16 hours of light a day. How do you do that when there are only 12 hours of daylight? I use full spectrum bulbs suspended over the trays of seeds. My lamps are controlled by a timer so that I don't have to remember to turn them on or off!

In about another 4 weeks, they will be ready to transplant into larger pots before planting. I'll do another Newsletter when it's time to put them into 4" pots.

Remember, **milkweed is the only plant that is host to Monarch butterflies.** That is, it's the only plant a monarch can lay eggs on and have the right nutrients to feed a hungry monarch caterpillar. One caterpillar can go through 1 plant in a few days, so in order to sustain them long enough to mature, be sure and grow 10-20 plants fairly close together.



Seedlings bask in artificial sunlight from 6 am to 10 pm

Local Resource: Shooting Star Nursery

Our friends at Shooting Star Nursery in Central Point care deeply about the health of pollinators. "**Everything we grow at Shooting Star Nursery is Neonic-Free!** Neonicotinoids (neonics for short) are a class of pesticide extremely toxic to bees and other pollinators and are a major factor in pollinator declines. The chemical, called a 'systemic,' moves throughout the entire plant, making pollen and nectar in flowers toxic. Both systemic and persistent, neonics continue to affect bees long after a spray through soil absorption.

Neonicotinoid pesticide active ingredients to avoid include: Acetamiprid, Clothianidin, Dinotefuran, Imidacloprid, Thiacloprid, and Thiamethoxam. You can be assured plants grown at Shooting Star Nursery are neonic-free and pollinator friendly!"

In addition, they are one of the few nurseries in the area that stocks many native trees, shrubs and other plants.

For a terrific list of pollinator-friendly plants go to their website by clicking [here](#).



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