

Cultural Significance of Milkweed

Look at the images below showing the different stages of milkweed as it develops from spring to fall. As you read about the cultural significance of milkweed, take notes by these images about the different uses humans have found for plants at the different developmental stages. You will use these notes to share your learning and answer questions together with classmates who have read other articles.

Stage	Image	Notes
newly emerged		
vegetative growth		
buds		
flowers		
unripe fruits/pods		
seed dispersal		

You will be assigned a reading. As you read, *please keep in mind that milkweeds protect themselves with toxins that affect the heart, and there are even more toxic plants that may be confused with them. So please do not eat or use milkweed medicinally without guidance from experts.* Find readers of the other articles who can help you answer questions below about the cultural significance of milkweed.

1. [Herbal Milkweeds](#)—Essential Guide. *Asclepias syriaca* (pp. 29-31) and *Recipes* (pp. 37-38).
2. [Herbal Milkweeds](#)—Essential Guide. Introduction, *Ethnobotany* (pp. 4-7).
3. [Compiled Indigenous Recipes and Reflections on Milkweed as Food](#)
4. [Milkweed Fruits-Pods of Plenty. The Washington Post. Sept. 25, 2012.](#)

Names	Food	Fiber	Medicine
What does the scientific name <i>Asclepias</i> signify? Named in honor of the god of healing (2)	When and how can one prepare milkweed to serve it in a similar way to asparagus? Young milkweed spears, in the spring, before they are 10 inches tall. The spears are steamed three times to detoxify. Can be served hot or cold and typically served with a nut butter. (1)	When and how did children collect fibers from milkweed plants for the US Navy? Why? During World War 2, supplies were limited so children collected ripe milkweed pods to be used for life jackets. Each open-mesh bag held about a bushel, or 600 to 800 pods. Two bags provided enough floss for one life vest. More than 1.5 billion pods were collected to make 1.2 million life vests.(4) The floss (fluff) from the milkweed seeds was used (1)	What part of the milkweed plant has been used to treat topical concerns like bee stings, warts, or ringworm? Milky sap (1).
What is the Potawatami name for milkweed? nenwejek (3)	When and how can one prepare milkweed to serve it in a similar way to okra? When young milkweed pods up to 1.5" long. Simmer for ½ an hour with scallions and maple syrup. (1)	What are some products that have been made from mature milkweed stems? Pipes, flutes, and beads (2)	What part of the milkweed plant has been burned to treat asthma? The leaves were smoked and burned to treat asthma (2)

What is the Ho-Chunk (or Winnebago) name for milkweed? Mahic (Pronounced Maheech)	Recent scientific research shows that cutting back milkweed can benefit monarchs. Who has practiced this habit for their own benefit for many years? You can prune the milkweed to promote growth—the Potawatami people have done this during certain times of the year. (3)	What close relative of milkweed also produces fibers from stems that have been woven into nets, ropes, and other objects. Dogbane (2)	When and how would one harvest milkweed for medicinal purposes in comparison to food. Why? seeds have omega-7 rich oil; oil is antiinflammatory (4) Parts of the plant used for medicinal purposes are often mature (leaves) or defensive in nature (like the milky sap/ latex). Parts of the plant harvested for food are often young/less developed-probably because they have less toxins. Also they are boiled to remove toxins.
Additional Resources: ○ Forager Chef guide to milkweed; ○ Milkweed: Medicine of Monarchs and Humans, by Lindsay Stafford Mader; ○ Berkman, B. 1949. Milkweed: A War Strategic Material ... <i>Economic Botany</i>.			