

# MILKWEED: The Ultimate Sanctuary



Visit a wildlife sanctuary and there's a good chance you will spot milkweed. This native plant is like its own tiny wildlife sanctuary. The flowers provide a safe place for small animals to seek food, water, and shelter. Some animals can only find the food they need on milkweed. The next time you're around some milkweed, take a closer look and see which of these creatures you can find.

## Bumblebees

The bumblebee is one of few insects big and strong enough to carry milkweed pollen. The plant makes a lot of sweet nectar in return for the bee's hard work. Look carefully at the bumblebees you see on the flowers. Do they all look the same? Probably not—there are at least seven different species that can be found just in and around Boston!

## Monarch Butterfly

Monarch butterfly caterpillars only eat milkweed leaves. Although the plant is poisonous to most creatures, these caterpillars aren't harmed by the poison and will store it in their bodies. Predators who are foolish enough to try to eat one of these caterpillars will get sick and will probably leave the other monarch caterpillars alone.

## Eastern Milkweed Bugs

This insect has a mouth that looks and works like a long straw. Poking its mouth into a milkweed seed, the bug slurps up the liquid like a milkweed-flavored milkshake. Look for these bugs on the milkweed's seed pods in late summer.

## Crab Spiders

These spiders, which look like crabs, can change color to match the part of the flower they're using as a hiding place. This comes in handy when hunting for bees, their meal of choice.

## Red Milkweed Beetles

These funny-looking beetles grow up underground eating milkweed roots. Once they become adults, they come up out of the ground and eat the plant's leaves and flowers. If you carefully pick up a milkweed beetle and hold it to your ear, you'll hear it make a soft, mechanical squeaking sound. It makes this sound when it's upset, so put the little bug back gently!

## Ready, Set, Go Outside!

Go to [massaudubon.org/go](https://massaudubon.org/go) and download our **Milkweed Sanctuary Checklist**. See how many species you can find!



Mass Audubon