COMMON MILKWEED

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) has been in decline over recent years due to development and an increase in herbicides. It is one of the only plants where the Monarch butterfly can lay her eggs. The monarch caterpillar feeds on the Common Milkweed leaves. The flowers of this plant are very attractive to numerous native pollinators and provide significant benefit during its long bloom time.

**You have received a pack of Common Milkweed seeds. What do you do with them?**

Common Milkweed seeds can be scattered in a garden anytime but it is best in late fall. The seeds need to go through a period of cold stratification which is simply exposing the seeds to the cold. The cold winter should do the trick but it is not guaranteed. Sometimes it takes a season or two until you see plants come up. Often people forget they planted something there and plant over them. Another way to handle your Common Milkweed seeds is to follow the directions below to ensure your plants will grow.

**Scarification**
Scarification is the scratching or softening of the seed coat so water and air can enter the seed. The easiest and safest way to scarify seed is to fill a paper bag with dry sand, put the milkweed seeds in with the sand, give the bag a few shakes and then remove the seeds from the sand by pouring the contents of the bag into a metal strainer. The sand will fall through the strainer holes but the seeds will not.

**Vernalization**
Seeds of most temperate plants need to be vernalized, which is a fancy way of saying that they need cold treatment to replicate the seed’s life cycle during the winter months. The best way to give the required vernalization is through stratification, artificially exposing seeds to cold, moist conditions.

Materials: plastic zip-lock bags, paper towels, spray bottle filled with water, permanent marker, seeds

- Lay out two layers of paper towels ripped in 2 sheet panels
- Spray the paper towels until completely moist
- Spread Milkweed, a single layer of seeds evenly across 1 panel of the paper towel
- Fold over the other panel so the seeds are sandwiched between the moist paper towels
- Place the folded moist paper towel with seeds flat into the zip-lock bag, seal bag while removing as much air as possible.
- Label the zip-lock bag with the date completed
- Place zip-lock bag flat in refrigerator
- You can stack zip-lock bags on top each other, just be sure they are flat so the seeds stay evenly spaced within the moist paper towel.
- Keep seeds in refrigerator for 5-6 weeks
Planting Seeds
At the end of 5-6 weeks the seeds need to be brought out of dormancy and germinated. For most effective germination, a process of shocking and scarification should be done.

Materials: bucket, warm water, potting soil, seed trays

Shocking:
- Fill bucket with warm water, around 70°F
- Remove seeds from zip-lock bag and put into bucket of warm water
- Let soak in water for 24 hours

Scarification:
- Remove seeds from bucket and place in plastic container
- Add course sand to the container
- Shake back and forth seeds with sand for 30 seconds

Germinating:
- Fill seed trays almost completely full with potting soil
- Place a single seed into each cell lightly pushing seed just below the soil
- Fill the rest of the cell with soil to completely cover seed
- Label the seed tray with seed info and date seeded
- Water the seeded trays, they should be well watered when first seeded
- Place in warm area with sunlight
- Most seeds will germinate in 7-10 days if flats are maintained at 75°F
- Keep watering the plants daily, soil should be moist, not soaked

The plants are ready to be transplanted when they are about 3-6 inches in height.

Once the plant grows and produces its own seed pods, you can share them with friends!

Thank you for taking the time to plant these seeds correctly! Be sure to check our website for more conservation information. www.cuyahogaswcd.org