



United States Department of Agriculture

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm Butterfly Milkweed *Asclepias tuberosa L.*

A Conservation Plant Release by USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center, Corning, New York



Butterfly milkweed in full bloom. Photo taken at the USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center, New York.

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa L.*) is a source-identified ecotype release. In 2002 it was released by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Big Flats Plant Materials Center in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy, Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Description

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed is a native, long-lived perennial forb in the milkweed family with showy orange flowers blooming in June to late August. It can grow 12 to 36 inches tall and has rich green foliage that is narrow in shape. Butterfly milkweed has 3 inch long seedpods that mature in late summer to early fall. Butterfly milkweed has a large taproot. Unlike other milkweeds, this plant has clear sap, and the level of toxic glycosides is consistently low.

Source

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed was collected in stands within Glacial Lake Albany, from Albany, New York to Glens Falls, New York, and within the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, just west of Albany, New York. The elevation within the collections sites is approximately 300 feet, containing a savanna-like ecosystem with sandy soils, wind swept into dunes, following the last glacial period. There was very little variability observed in collected stands, therefore, any collection of butterfly milkweed within Glacial Lake Albany would be considered a constituent of this source-identified release.

Conservation Uses

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed is used for endangered species habitat restoration and general improvement of the pitch pine-scrub oak barrens of Glacial Lake Albany. These barrens are a globally rare ecosystem and provides habitat for 43 rare species, including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly (*Lycaeides Melissa samuelis*). The genus *Asclepias* is the sole food plant for monarch butterfly larvae. *Asclepias tuberosa* in particular is also a preferred nectar source for many other butterfly species.

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed can also be planted by homeowners in butterfly gardens and by landowners in habitat restoration seedings that will provide food and attract butterflies and other pollinators. Being drought tolerant, it would be ideal for restoration seedings on drier sites, meadows, and roadsides. .

Area of Adaptation and Use



Red circle indicates collection site areas of Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed. Photo courtesy of rocketbanner.com

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed is commonly found on sites with dry soils in clearings or edges of fields. It grows on loamy or rocky limestone soils, but prefers sandy soils. It is from the northern edge of its national range, which is from central New England to Minnesota south.

Establishment and Management for Conservation Plantings

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed can be propagated from seed sown in fall or spring. Seed collected in the fall, must be stored in a cool, dry place until utilized. Seed sown in the fall will readily germinate

in late spring when environmental conditions allow. Butterfly milkweed should not be planted in an area that requires regular mowing. The plants will not flower if they are mowed at any time from late spring to early summer. A single mowing after flowering and seed production may encourage production of new stems and result in a more fully branched plant. Plants can also be mowed in late fall, after frost. Weed control is needed in the first year, but once established, butterfly milkweed will compete well with other native vegetation.

Ecological Considerations

Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed is a collection of a naturally occurring germplasm and has not been altered. An assessment of this native plant concludes that it is not invasive, nor does it have any potential to become invasive. Milkweeds can be poisonous to livestock.

Seed Propagation

Collect Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed seed when pods just begin to split, but before seeds are exposed. Pods can be collected earlier if seeds inside have turned brown. To clean butterfly milkweed seed, split the pod and remove the mass of seeds and down (white silky material attached to seed). Grasp the seed with one hand and down with the other, and pull seed free from the down. Store the seed in a dry, cool place until use.

To establish seed production fields, sow seed in the spring or older seed in the fall for stratification. If starting the seed indoors, and transplanting plugs outside, cold-moist stratify the seeds for 30-60 days, at 40°F. Plugs can also be planted in the spring, after there is no risk of frost. Plant plugs at least 8-12 inches apart. The Big Flats Plant Materials Center starts the seed indoors in late winter, and transplants plugs in early summer, into black, weed control fabric. Plants are spaced 6 inches apart, and weed control is done as needed.

Availability

For seed or plant increase: Glacial Lake Albany Germplasm butterfly milkweed can be obtained by contacting the New York Seed Improvement Project, Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, or the USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center.

For more information, contact:
USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials
Center,
3266 State Route 352
Corning, New York 14830
607-562-8404 (phone)
1-855-401-1955 (fax)
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/nypmc/>

Citation

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For additional information about this and other plants, please contact your local USDA Service Center, NRCS field office, or Conservation District <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>>, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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