



BCT Stewardship Journal: May 2024

Species Spotlight: Butterflyweed *Asclepias tuberosa*

As I walk up the ramp to the Hay Conservation Center each morning, I can't help but stop for a moment to admire our native meadow, blooming with productivity. The purple spiderwort flowers, open in the morning and closed in the afternoon, are bustling with bees and the golden yellow lanceleaf coreopsis are lovely as they sway in the morning breeze. All of our little meadow's features are quite dazzling, however my favorite part has to be the brilliant orange specks of butterflyweed scattered throughout. So prolific in our meadow, it has even begun to spread among the rocks in the gap between the front porch and ramp. With its vibrant orange blooms, a striking contrast against its shiny green leaves, it is no wonder that this plant is a popular addition to any native landscape.

Butterflyweed, or *Asclepias tuberosa*, is a species of milkweed native to the eastern half of North America. Unlike other species of milkweed, butterflyweed sap is not thick and white but watery and clear. Its bright orange flowers are filled with nectar and pollen and attract a multitude of butterflies and bees, including the threatened monarch butterfly. This



Butterflyweed blooms about to burst open in the Hay parking lot, featuring a little pollinator friend!



Butterflyweed growing along the entranceway to Hay Conservation Center

showy milkweed is common in the prairies and grasslands of the Midwest and Great Plains and is often found in meadows along the East coast.

If you are looking to include this incredible native in your landscape, several local plant nurseries around Brewster carry 4" to gallon sized pots including Crocker Nurseries and Cape Abilities. With its long woody taproot, it is not recommended to transplant butterfly weed, but rather propagate it from seed. The long narrow fruit pods develop in late summer and turn brown in the fall, indicating that the seed is ready to be harvested. Each pod contains hundreds of seeds equipped with soft white fibers that catch the wind and spread the seed. For best results starting from seed, spread in the desired location in the fall, and wait for them to naturally germinate in the spring. It takes around three years to start seeing the iconic orange blooms, but very much worth the wait!