

# WESTERN WHORLED MILKWEED

(ASCLEPIAS SUBVERTICILLATA)

## Background/ Description

Native to North America and Mexico, western whorled milkweed is a perennial plant predominantly found across the western states. Found along roadsides, ditch banks, pastures, and cultivated fields during the summer months.

Mexican whorled milkweed can grow up to 1 to 3 feet in height. Leaves are commonly folded in an upright position along the vein and are arranged in whorls of 3 to 4. The sap of this plant contains a milky white latex.

This milkweed reproduces primarily through seed but can reproduce an underground root system. The seeds are produced in pods after the milkweed has produced a pale pink flower, purple or greenish-white in color at times. The seeds are covered in a fluffy tuft of deciduous silky hairs that enable the seed to travel further distances.

All parts of the plant are toxic to sheep, cattle, horses, and domestic fowl. Though not palatable, they are consumed when low forage is available. Milkweed species may not be desirable in all areas, but is a necessary part of the lifecycle for the monarch butterfly. These species must be incorporated into their diet as the larvae feed solely on the milkweed plant



Picture courtesy of Shelly L. Simmons, Purgatoire Watershed  
Weed Management Collaborative

## Biological Control

No biological control has been determined for this species.

## Cultural Control

Grazing is not advised as this species is non-palatable to livestock as well as toxic. Burning can kill the plant's top growth, but regrowth from the undamaged rhizomes is highly possible. In some cases, burning has been shown to stimulate re-sprouting and increased flowering and seed production.

## Mechanical Control

Hand pulling can be a productive method for removal of smaller population sizes. Proper protective gear for removal is suggested. Mowing may reduce the seed population size but will not control the species.

Tilling is not recommended as it can stimulate the root segments and allow the growth of new plants.

## Chemical Control

Determining the site location and characteristics plays a vital role in choosing which herbicide can be used within that area.

Glyphosate works well to kill plants' top growth and pushes the life expectancy back when used as directed. This herbicide is very useful as it is readily available and works well on many plants. With that characteristic, it is highly cautioned on where this should be applied. Glyphosate works on many types of grass or broadleaf plant species it may contact. Furthermore, if desirable plants are within the site of application, caution should be used.

Using an application with a mix of Dicamba and 2,4-D can control whorled milkweed in sites including but not limited to such as rangeland, pastures, and crops. This compound can affect broadleaf species in close contact with the chemical and should be avoided if those plants are desired. 2,4-D can become more volatile in conditions where temperatures meet and exceed 80 degrees and should be avoided if conditions exist.

Picloram is an excellent example of an herbicide that can work effectively to control milkweed, but if used in areas close to water or around desirable trees, it can be disastrous. This compound can sit in the soil for up to 3 years, depending on the soil and climate conditions. This chemical is labeled as a 'Restricted Use' chemical and requires a licensed applicator to purchase and apply it. Reading the herbicide label can define the hazards that may affect the environment, people, and animals it may encounter. Always follow the label. The Label is the LAW!



Picture courtesy of Shelly L. Simmons, Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative

HERBICIDE	RATE PER ACRE	APPLICATION TIMING / NOTES
Glyphosate (Ranger Pro, etc.)	32 oz. to 64 oz.	Treat during the reproductive stage of growth. Use caution using glyphosate as it is non-selective and will affect all other plants it comes in contact with.
2,4-D + Dicamba (Range Star XLT, Weedmaster, etc)	32 oz. to 64 oz.	Lower rates at the pre-flower stage. Higher rates during the bloom stage. Avoid temperatures above 80° and conditions of low humidity.
Picloram (Tordon 22K)	32 oz.	Picloram is a restricted use herbicide. Do not apply near trees, where the soil is highly permeable, and where the water table is high. Application timing varies with the treatment site.

### References

Ditomaso, J.M., G.B. Kyser et al. 2013. *Weed Control in Natural Areas in the Western United States*. Weed Research and Information Center, University of California. 544 pp.

Colorado State University Extension. (2014). *Managing Western Whorled Milkweed*. [Fact Sheet]. <https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/natres/06111.pdf>

