

# MNL Milkweed Picking Tips and FAQ's

- 1. When is the right time to harvest?** Milkweed seed ripens inside the pods at varying times, but a majority of it ripens between mid to late September. The pods begin to dry out and fade from a light green to a gray/brown color as they ripen. Don't wait too long or the pods will burst open and the seed will blow away! Dry, brown seeds indicate the ideal mature seed, if some seeds are white or green at the time of picking, they will ripen in the pods as they dry out. MNL has the equipment needed to dry seeds from pods that aren't quite ripe, however, there is increased risk of pods becoming moldy and rotting if picked too soon and stored.
- 2. How should I store milkweed pods that I have harvested?** Pods should be kept in a cool, dry area and aerated if possible so they do not rot. We recommend picking up collection bags from MNL's partner hub locations. If you keep the pods in buckets, try to stir them every couple days to keep them from getting moldy. Be sure to label each storage container with your name, county you picked from, and how many full bags or 5-gallon buckets you have.
- 3. How do I go about picking pods?** Scouting for plants is easy, look for the large green oval leaves! (See our gallery on the milkweed homepage for photos, including ripe and over-ripe pods!) Milkweed grows everywhere from road ditches to backyards and abandoned fields. Once found, snap the pods off the plants being careful not to pull off leaves, stems, and other parts of plant. You can transfer picked milkweed to bags or larger containers, it does not need to be kept in 5-gallon buckets (you do not need to turn in the buckets with the pods). We recommend wearing gloves to keep the sticky sap from coming in contact with your skin.
- 4. Can I pick the milkweed that is in my garden?** The purpose of this project is to proliferate native milkweed strands. Please do not harvest any milkweed pods that are known to be varietal, grown for ornamental and landscape purposes.
- 5. Is picking milkweed pods legal?** Yes. However, harvesting of any materials for commercial use off of most state and federally owned conservation areas such as WMAs, WPAs, SNAs, etc. is prohibited by law. Be sure to obtain permission from the proper authority before picking from any areas you are unsure about, including ditches that you do not own.
- 6. Does picking the pods impact the plants?** No. Milkweeds are perennial plants, so picking the seed will not inhibit the plant from returning next year. Just use caution not to pull the plants out of the ground or trample them. With any seed collecting, we encourage leaving a small portion of the seed to disperse naturally.
- 7. Why don't we don't just leave the seeds alone to spread themselves?** Milkweed seeds do disperse and spread naturally, but they have a very low survival rate when competing with other fallow growth. By harvesting, cleaning, and intentionally planting the seed, we create a much higher success rate for milkweed germination.
- 8. Do you accept other species of milkweed?** Yes. Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) is the most likely to be found, but we also accept any other Milkweed pods (ex: Butterfly Milkweed or Marsh Milkweed). Just be sure to keep the species separate and label them if you are picking more than one.

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9. **Do you accept milkweed from outside the metro?** Yes! We will take milkweed from anywhere in the Midwest. Again, just be sure to label with the county/state you collected it from.
10. **How much milkweed will you accept?** As much as you can get! MNL hopes to greatly expand the amount of milkweed available in the marketplace for Monarch habitat enhancement projects throughout the Upper Midwest.
11. **Will you take less than 1 bucket?** Yes, we'll take any quantity, every little bit helps.
12. **There are orange/black bugs on my pods, are these pods still ok?** Yes. In addition to the Monarchs, there are other bugs that utilize milkweed plants. Try to minimize impact on these bugs as you pick the pods, or avoid those pods with lots of bugs.
13. **How do I get my milkweed to MNL?** Milkweed pods can be dropped off at any of our partner hubs or our two office locations: a. Main Office: 8740 77th St NE, Otsego MN 55362 b. Greenhouse: 14088 Hwy 95 NE Foley, MN 56329 Harvested pod collection hubs are established at various locations throughout the state, Let us know if you have any interest in hosting a hub!
14. **What does MNL do with the seed?** Collected seed is separated by county of origin and cleaned of the pod, floss, and any contaminated weed seeds. The cleaned viable seeds are then used in our native seed mixes and native plants grown in the MNL greenhouse! We are able to donate a portion of these seeds and plants to projects including school plantings, pollinator plots, and more!

Keep an eye on our website for updates and more information!