

Asclepias incarnata 'Ice Ballet'
a white milkweed



Asclepias incarnata 'Ice Ballet' - white milkweed

I first read about *Asclepias incarnata 'Ice Ballet'* in a mail-order catalog several years ago. A few words in its description caught my attention 'likes moist to wet soil.' Whenever I read those or similar words, I always wonder 'is this a potential water garden plant?' To find out, I ordered a couple. On arrival, I planted each in one-gallon black nursery pots and placed them in two container water gardens as the marginal plant. I kept the top of each pot an inch or so above the water level. Both small water gardens received full sun, a requirement.

I fertilized when potting and monthly through August as I was treating them as blooming marginal plants. They flourished, producing beautiful clusters of tiny white flowers, Monarchs visited and before the summer was over, I discovered a chrysalis dangling amongst the foliage on one of the plants. I did not see it until the distinctive colors of the Monarch were visible inside. I watched as a new generation butterfly emerged, spent about an hour resting on the plant before flying off. So amazing to watch this process happen in nature and on one of my 'water garden' plants.



White milkweed as a marginal plant in a container water garden

'Ice Ballet' is not native in the wild but is hardy zones 3-9. It grows from a taproot so best not to move the plant after it is established in the garden where it grows three- to four-feet tall. In the one-gallon container, it attained a height of about 30-inches. New growth is slow to break ground in the spring. Be patient, it will come. The flower nectar is food for adult butterflies and the foliage hosts the Monarch eggs and is the only diet of its larvae (caterpillars).

After a couple years containerized, I planted the milkweeds in two different perennial gardens. Only one survived the transplant but it is thriving. It grows in a garden near our house and we enjoy the lovely white flowers and the butterfly activity from the family room. To answer my question - Yes, *Asclepias incarnata* 'Ice Ballet' can be a water plant, at least for a while. Can it grow in a container indefinitely, even if the container is upsized? I don't know but probably best to plant it in a moist garden area after a couple of years in a container.