

sulfur powder half and half with talcum powder and apply this to their skin before going out into chigger country.

TREATMENT. Once you have been bitten by chiggers, you will soon be aware of that horrible itch. Unfortunately, the only real treatment is time—usually a few days. Do not scratch! That can cause infection. And do not apply nail polish as old folk remedies suggest—that will not work!

You can alleviate that itch with local anesthetics that may provide a few hours of relief. Benzocaine, camphor-phenol and ammonium hydroxide are among the local anesthetics suggested by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Creams and lotions that are classed as antihistamines and corticosteroids often are recommended to help control the insufferable itching. You can, of course, also check with your physician who may prescribe treatment that is not over-the-counter.

Midwesterners will be no doubt pleased to know that chiggers, unlike ticks, transmit no diseases.

THE SCIENCE OF CHIGGERS. Chiggers are the larvae of mites in the Trombiculidae family. The larvae feed on the skin cells, not the blood, of many animals, including humans. The larvae have just six legs while the adults have the requisite eight legs of all mites. The larvae crawl onto the skin of their host and injects saliva with digestive enzymes that break down skin cells. This is the larval chigger's only meal before it continues in its life cycle of egg, larva, nymph and adult.

These parasites do not actually bite but rather insert piercing mouth parts that are delicate and short. Within a few hours, the host's skin hardens cells on the sides of the saliva path to form a stylostome, a tube-like structure. The mite larva then can suck up the liquefied skin cells as it continues injecting saliva. It is this tubular stylostome that irritates the surrounding tissue, causes the signature welt and horrible itching. If you have a chigger bite, you may be able to see a small red spot in the center of the welt that is what remains of the stylostome.

GREET SPRING. Greet the spring with the knowledge that you can wisely avoid and treat one of our most dreaded parasites.



My favorite of Missouri's milkweeds

Ted C. MacRae¹



Clasp milkweed (*Asclepias amplexicaulis*).

Milkweeds of the genus *Asclepias* are among my favorite plants, although I'm not fully sure why that is the case. Sure, their blooms are conspicuous and colorful, but so are those of many other plants. Perhaps one reason is their status as hosts for milkweed beetles (genus *Tetraopes*, family Cerambycidae). Four species of these beetles occur in Missouri, including the rare *T. texanus*. Another reason might be their diversity—in Missouri alone there are 16 different species, ranging from the ubiquitous common milkweed (*A. syriaca*) to the federally endangered Mead's milkweed (*A. meadii*). The latter is one of six milkweed species occurring in Missouri that I have not yet seen, so I suppose I should withhold judgement until I've succeeding in finding all 16 species. Nevertheless, I would have to say that clasp milkweed (*A. amplexicaulis*) has to be my favorite of Missouri's milkweeds.

Clasp milkweed (also known as sand milkweed—not to be confused with *A. arenaria* occurring further west in the Great Plains) is said to occur sporadically throughout Missouri in prairies, glades, rocky open woods, roadsides, and railroads. However, I have seen this species only a few times—all in dry sand habitats in the southeastern Mississippi Alluvial Plain (or, the “bootheel” as we say here in Missouri). Until a

¹ Originally posted April 6, 2013 at the author's website, *Beetles in the Bush* (<http://beetlesinthebush.wordpress.com>). All photos by the author.



[Sand Prairie Conservation Area, Scott Co., Missouri.](#)

few years ago the only time I had ever seen this plant was many years in an eroded sandy opening on Crowley's Ridge (an elevated ridge of alluvium and loess deposited during the last glacial maximum). Those plants were not in flower, but their was no mistaking their identity due to their erect stems and broad, cordate-clasping, tomentulose leaves with wavy margins. I would see this plant again a few years ago during my first visit to [Sand Prairie Conservation Area](#), and although I would see it again on many subsequent visits, at no time did I succeed in seeing the blooms.

Finally, last year, I returned to Sand Prairie during late April (a weather-delayed installment of my Annual-Birthday-First-Bug-Collecting-Trip-of-the-Year). I had actually gone there to photograph Missouri's unique intergrade population of the Festive Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela scutellaris*), but the weather was cool and the beetles apparently had decided to remain in their burrows. A bad day of collecting, however, is still better than a good day of just about anything else—perhaps because there are almost always consolation prizes, and my consolation prize on this day was my first sight of clasping milkweed plants in full bloom.

I may not be exactly sure why I like milkweeds so much, but I think I now know why I like clasping milkweed above all others. The softly colored green and pink blossoms are exquisite, to be sure, but more importantly the species is firmly linked in my mind to one of my favorite Missouri habitats. I imagine that clasping milkweed might be an attractive, if somewhat gangly, addition to a native wildflower garden. However, I'm not sure I would enjoy cultivated plants in my garden as much as I



Broad, clasping, tomentulose leaves with wavy margins (top), while a single inflorescence atops each stem (bottom).

do seeing wild plants in one of Missouri's rarest and most endangered natural communities.



Group Activity/Walk Schedules

BOTANY GROUP

Chair—George Van Brunt

Monday Botany Walks, Leader—Fr. James Sullivan; now in his **45th year!** The WGNSS Botany Group visits many of the same locations as