

Collecting your own swan plant seeds.

Swan plants are host plants for the monarch butterfly. Since these plants are not native to New Zealand the butterflies depend on plants grown in gardens. When the seedpods have matured the seeds can be harvested and any floss or insects cleaned off. Once this has been done they can be folded up in a paper towel and sealed in a plastic snaplock bag excluding as much air as possible. After that they can be stored in the refrigerator until spring. Any unwanted seeds can be given away or sent to the Monarch Butterfly New Zealand Trust, PO Box 44100, Pt Chevalier, Auckland 1246.

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A mature swan plant seedpod. It is easy to see how it got the name 'swan plant'. Its botanical name is *Gomphocarpus fruticosus*, formerly known as *Asclepias fruticosa*. Its other common name is African milkweed.



When the seedpod is mature it will start to split open underneath. This is the ideal time to harvest the seed. Seeds harvested from immature pods will probably not be fertile.



In this seed pod the opening is larger and the dark brown seeds can be seen clearly. The white floss attached to the seeds is also known as pappus or silk. At this stage it is still damp and compressed, making it easy to handle.



The seeds can easily be removed from the seedpod by holding onto the floss.



The seeds attached to their floss.



Hold the floss tight and brush the seeds off.



Discard any seeds that do not seem fully formed. These are all from the same seedpod, yet the three on the right are clearly smaller and shrivelled.



Once the seedpod splits open completely the floss threads dry and fluff out, ready to be dispersed by the wind. It is very difficult and time-consuming trying to collect seeds from a seedpod in this stage.



A swan plant seed showing its floss. This stuff is unbelievably fine and gets everywhere when it is like this.