September Hort Report

There are many species of Asclepias, both annual and perennial, a few of which I will mention. Ann Bryce has asked me to talk about Asclepias, and distribute seeds that came from her plant Asclepias tuberosa ‘Hello Yellow’. The species Asclepias tuberosa has orange flowers, but ‘Hello Yellow’ is a cultivar, and it has yellow flowers. This cultivar grows as a perennial in our climate. The plant I have brought to show you, with it’s yellow-gold flowers, is A. curassavica ‘Silky Gold’, an annual. In my yard I also have A. syriaca, the common milkweed, which arrived as a result of me taking seed from the edge of fields, and sprinkling them around my garden beds. All of these are food sources for the Monarch Butterfly caterpillar and the Milkweed Tussock moth caterpillar. The caterpillars may completely denude your plants, but the perennials will survive. The plant won’t look very attractive, but the caterpillars will benefit, and hopefully pupate successfully. All milkweeds can be spread easily by distributing the seeds, after the pod has split in the autumn, onto bare earth, and covering with a very light layer of mulch or soil. For spreading in a meadow, the rain and snow will wash them down, and dying vegetation of other plants will work as a natural mulch. The trick is not to disturb the earth in the spring until the seedlings have emerged. If you prefer, you can place your seedpod in a bag, keep it in a cool dark place, and chill at least 30 days in the refrigerator before starting the seeds in the spring. A. tuberosa may not bloom the first year, but flowers do not have to be present for the butterflies to choose your plant for laying their eggs.