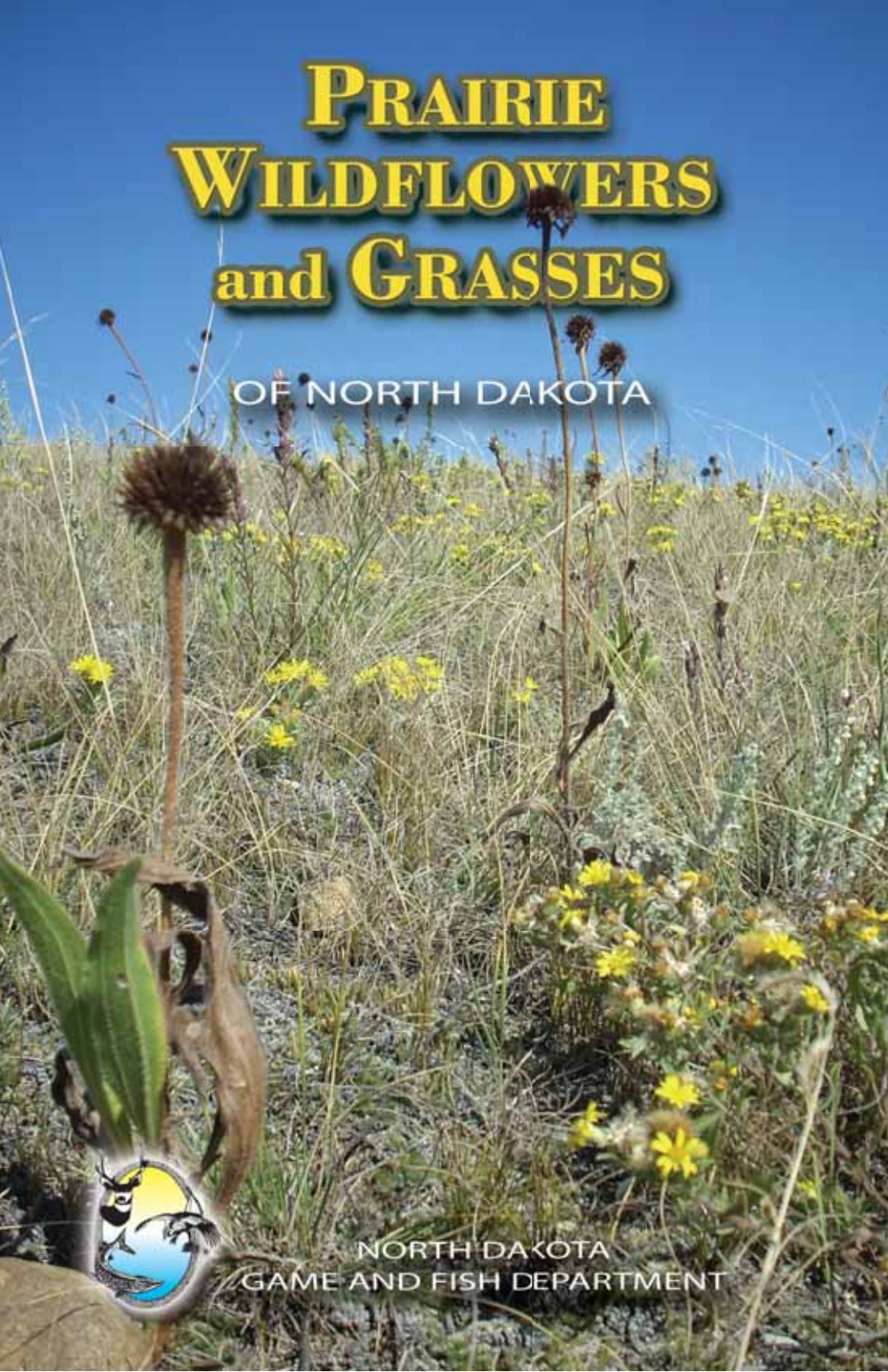


PRAIRIE WILDFLOWERS and GRASSES

OF NORTH DAKOTA



NORTH DAKOTA
GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT



Prairie Wildflowers and Grasses

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Introduction

Prairies, or grasslands, in North Dakota and throughout the Great Plains have been gaining public interest over the last couple decades as more people became aware of their decline. Before the 1870s, prairies covered more than a third of the United States and almost all of North Dakota. What once was a mosaic of grasses and forbs (flowering plants) where buffalo roamed is now predominately agricultural land. With the arrival of increasing numbers of settlers in the late 1800s, the landscape started to change and continued to such a great extent that very little remains.

Loss of diversity and distribution of prairie grass and forbs are of great concern, but it's not just the plants that have suffered. Grasslands not only provide primary nesting habitat for a variety of bird species, but also are important staging and feeding areas for waterfowl and shorebirds during long migratory flights. In addition, prairies provide an important food source for small mammals and insects, which in turn support larger wildlife species. From a human standpoint, prairies can help to maintain clean air and water, control erosion, provide rich soil, are rich in history and folklore, and provide community income as a result of wildlife related recreation and tourism. All this combined makes it easy to see why prairies are now considered to be the most endangered ecosystems.

Historically, North Dakota was predominantly mixed-grass prairie in the southwest and tallgrass in the northeast. As the total annual precipitation increases eastward across the state, conditions allowed for taller, more robust grasses. Today some of the best places to find prairie plants in North Dakota are federal grassland refuges, state-owned land, railway right-of-ways, ditches, old cemeteries, and pastures on private property throughout the Missouri Coteau in central and western parts of the state.

Prairie Decline in North Dakota

A combination of factors are to blame for this loss. Large-scale agriculture is a major factor, but fire suppression, introduction of exotic species, altered hydrology and development also contributed.



Getting to Know Your Prairie Wildflowers and Grasses

This guide is intended to provide beginners with an overview of North Dakota's prairie wildflowers and grasses. It is by no means an exclusive list, but it outlines many of the common prairie species in the state. It is not a scientific key, but does include descriptive clues for identification and other interesting facts. The flowers have been arranged into three primary groups based on when they bloom. The grasses follow at the end. We hope the guide will help you identify prairie wildflower and grass species and foster an appreciation of why it is important to continue conservation and restoration efforts of prairies in North Dakota.

Learning to identify prairie plants can be rewarding. This guide will get you started on more than 50 species. Since there are hundreds of prairie plants in North Dakota, there are a couple of publications which can provide you with a more in-depth study. They are: *Wildflowers of the Northern Great Plains* by F.R. Vance, J.R. Jowsey and J.S. McLean (ISBN #: 0-8166-1351-6) and *Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains* by James R. Johnson and Gary E. Larson (ISBN # 0-913062-06-5). Both of these guides are excellent publications for North Dakota plants.



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Prairie Crocus

(Anemone patens)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Undisturbed prairies

Flowers: 5 - 7 veined petals, pale blue or mauve in color, occasionally white or light yellow

Height: About 4 inches

Blooms: Mid-April to mid-May (earliest prairie flower)

Family name: Buttercup (Ranunculaceae)

Other names: Pasque flower, wild crocus, wind flower, or May flower

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Dakota Indians gave this flower special power, as they believed its song encouraged other plants to awaken.



Breadroot

(Psoralea esculenta)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Dry prairie hillsides

Flowers: Light, bluish purple in color, fades with age, flowers are arranged on short, dense stalks, leaves are hairy, 5 per stalk

Height: 5 - 9 inches

Blooms: May to early June

Family name: Legume (Fabaceae)

Other names: Prairie turnip

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Plains Indians used the starchy, tuberous root as a staple in their diet.





White Penstemon

(Penstemon albius)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland prairies, ditches and pastures

Flowers: White or pale purple in color, funnel shaped

Height: 6 - 16 inches

Blooms: Mid - May to late June

Family name: Figwort (Scrophulariaceae)

Other names: White beardtongue

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Root can be chewed to ease toothaches. "Penstemon" refers to its 5 stamens per flower.



Shell Leaf Penstemon

(Penstemon grandiflorus)

Distribution: West of the Missouri River and the counties bordering the river on the east

Habitat: Upland prairies, road cuts, Badlands

Flowers: Pink to lavender in color, two lipped, bell-shaped

Height: 12 - 28 inches

Blooms: Late May to end of June

Family name: Figwort (Scrophulariaceae)

Other names: Pink beardtongue

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Shell leaf penstemon is fair forage, best liked by deer, sheep and pronghorns. It has high reclamation potential.

Slender Penstemon

(Penstemon gracilis)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Prairies and roadsides

Flowers: Pale lavender, reflex lobes (not flaring)

Height: 8 - 20 inches

Blooms: Late May to late June

Family name: Figwort (Scrophulariaceae)

Other names: Slender beardtongue

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: The slender penstemon has smaller flowers and thinner stems than the shell leaf penstemon.



Downy Paintbrush

(Castilleja acuminata)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Open rocky prairie hillsides

Flowers: Yellowish to purplish in color, long slender gently arched petals are sometimes pink tipped

Height: 4 - 12 inches

Blooms: Late May to late June

Family name: Figwort (Scrophulariaceae)

Other names: Yellow Indian paintbrush

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Downy paintbrush is a hemiparasite, meaning it wraps its own roots around neighboring plants and takes nutrients.





Western Wallflower

(Erysimum asperum)

Distribution: Common statewide

Habitat: Upland prairies and ditches

Flowers: Pale yellow in color, with 4 bright petals up to 1 inch long, flowers cluster at the end of each stalk

Height: 8 - 27 inches

Blooms: Late May to late June

Family name: Mustard (Brassicaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Lakota Indians used the entire plant either in tea or chewed it to treat stomach and bowel cramps.



Ball Cactus

(Coryphantha vivipara)

Distribution: Statewide, except extreme east and northeast

Habitat: Dry, sandy, rocky prairie, road ditches, and south facing slopes

Flowers: Purple in color, fairly large and has many petals

Height: 1 - 2 inches

Blooms: Late May to July

Family name: Cactus (Cactaceae)

Other names: Purple pincushion cactus, nipple cactus

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Bees are attracted to pollen-laden blossoms when in bloom.

Prairie Smoke

(*Geum triflorum*)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Moist prairie, ditches, open woodlands, hillsides and ridges, commonly in large patches

Flowers: Drooping reddish purple feathery flowers, often 3 together on each stem, resemble a puff of smoke

Height: 6 - 12 inches

Blooms: Early May to mid-June

Family name: Rose (Roseaceae)

Other names: Torch flower, three-flowered avens, old man's whiskers

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Blackfoot Indians boiled the roots into tea to treat canker sores, sore throat, coughs, open wounds and boiled the plant in water to wash sore or inflamed eyes. They also mixed the roots with tobacco and smoked it to "clear the mind."



Smooth Fleabane

(*Erigeron glabellus*)

Distribution: Found north and east of Missouri River

Flowers: Pinkish/whitish with yellow center, disk 1/2 - to 1 - inch in diameter, 1 - 5 heads per plant

Height: 6 - 18 inches

Blooms: June to August

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: There are several fleabanes with similar appearance like the pink fleabane in the east.





Wild Blue Flax

(Linium lewisii)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Dry, open places such as upland prairie, road ditches and railway right-of-ways

Flowers: Pale blue in color, small (1 - inch), 5 petals with radiating lines of lighter blue flowers in loose clusters

Height: 10 - 24 inches

Blooms: Mid-May to late July

Family name: Flax (Linaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Named after Captain Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



Two-Grooved Vetch

(Astragalus spp.)

Distribution: Statewide, more common in west

Habitat: Prairies, pastures and ditches

Flowers: Reddish, purple, occasionally white in color, arranged in elongated clumps

Height: Up to 2 feet tall and 2 feet across

Blooms: Mid-May to late June

Family name: Legume (Fabaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: There are 4 - 6 species of milkvetch that are quite similar in appearance. They all have similar leaf patterns and flowers as described above.

Prairie Rose

(Rosa arkansana)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Prairie, open woodlands, thickets, and roadsides

Flowers: Mostly pink but can fade to white

Height: Less than 18 inches, plant is woody and shrub-like, has thorns along the stem

Blooms: June to August

Family name: Rose (Rosaceae)

Other names: Prairie wild rose

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: North Dakota's state flower.

Wildlife eat the rose hips. Plains

Indians used the hips to heal many

ailments, ate the hips in emergen-

cies, used the leaves for tea and the

new shoots for cooking. Today's uses include potpourri, air fresheners, teas, Vitamins A and C.



Purple Coneflower

(Echinacea angustifolia)

Distribution: Statewide, except northeast

Habitat: Prefers rocky prairie hillsides and weakly developed soils

Flowers: Purple to whitish in color

Height: 12 - 24 inches

Blooms: Mid-June to mid-August

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Other names: Black Sampson

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Most important plant to the

Plains Indians as a herbal medicine

for snake bites, stings, toothaches,

coughs, sore mouth and gums, neck

pain, mumps, measles, arthritis, small-

pox, boils and more. Large taproot

recently exploited as immune system booster in teas and vitamins. Related

to the ornamental *E. pupurea*, which is much taller and often seen in flower gardens.





Prairie Lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*)

Distribution: Statewide, except south-west quarter

Habitat: Moist areas in prairie and open woods

Flowers: 6 reddish-orange petals with purple dots and yellow base, lily-like in shape

Height: 12 - 30 inches

Blooms: Mid-June to mid - July

Family name: Lily (Liliaceae)

Other names: Wood lily, wild lily or Western red lily

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Dakota Indians used pulverized flowers to treat brown spider bites. Prairie lilies grow from bulbs, which can be used as food.



Purple Prairie Clover (*Dalea purpurea*)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland, rocky prairies and hillsides

Flowers: Purple on cylindrical spikes up to 2 inches long

Height: 1 - 3 feet, on multiple stems giving a bushy appearance

Blooms: Early July to mid-August

Family name: Legume (Fabaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Common in prairie restorations. Sometimes purple prairie clover can be an important component in prairie hay.

Prairie Coneflower

(Ratibida columnifera)

Distribution: Common statewide

Habitat: Upland prairie

Flowers: Rays are showy, droopy, and yellow in color

Height: 12 - 26 inches

Blooms: Mid-June to September

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Other names: Yellow coneflower

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Yellow coneflower is named after the cone-like shape of its flowers. Plains Indian made tea from it to cure stomach and headaches, rattlesnake bites, and poison ivy. It was also used as dye. Now being marketed for prairie restoration.



Common Yarrow

(Achillea millefolium)

Distribution: Common statewide

Habitat: Open prairie

Flowers: Cream colored growing in flat top clusters

Height: 10 - 30 inches

Blooms: June to August

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Leaves are fern-like and smell like sage. Plains Indians used yarrow to stop bleeding, treat sores and as a mild laxative. It can often spread aggressively.





Blanket Flower

(Gaillardia aristata)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland prairie

Flowers: Rays are yellow or with red toward the middle, central disk flowers are purplish/brown, single flower per stem

Height: 8 – 24 inches

Blooms: June to early July

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Other names: Gaillardia

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Used extensively in prairie restoration. Blackfoot Indians drank tea made from the root for gastroenteritis and applied the powdered root to treat skin irritation. They also boiled the whole plant for eye and nose drops.



Black-Eyed Susan

(Rudbeckia hirta)

Distribution: Eastern two-thirds of state

Habitat: Edges of woods and road ditches, especially where moist

Flowers: 10 - 20 orange yellow rays, 1 ½ to 2 inches long, dark brown center disk

Height: 12 – 24 inches

Blooms: July to September

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Black-eyed Susans are commonly used in restoration. They are “weak” biennials, which means they are generally annual, but can sometimes over winter.

Gumbo Lily

(Oenothera caespitosa)

Distribution: Western half of state

Habitat: Common on dry prairie hill-sides, on butte sides in Badlands

Flowers: The flower opens white in the evening, but soon turns pink, 4 petals, 1 - 1/2 to 3 inches across

Height: 2 - 3 inches

Blooms: June and July

Family name: Evening primrose (Onagraceae)

Other names: Gumbo evening primrose

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Pollinated by night-flying insects.



Scarlet Globemallow

(Sphaeralcea coccinea)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Gravelly, dry prairie soil

Flowers: Salmon-brick red with yellow center, 5 petals, leafy spikes have 4 - 6 flowers

Height: 4 - 12 inches

Blooms: Late May to late July

Family name: Mallow (Malvaceae)

Other names: Red falsemallow

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: One of the most drought resistant prairie plants, it sheds its leaves during drought. Dakota medicine men coated their hands and arms with the paste of this plant to painlessly pick meat out of scalding water.





Maximilian Sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Common in upland prairies, appearing in tight clusters or colonies

Flowers: Rays yellow in color, about 1 ½ inches long

Height: 3 – 8 feet

Blooms: Late June to mid-September

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Other names: Narrow-leafed sunflower

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Excellent songbird and deer food. Unlike its relatives, it is an indicator of well-managed rangelands. Distinguished from other sunflowers by leaves, which are folded lengthwise and curved downward.



Yucca (*Yucca glauca*)

Distribution: West of the Missouri River and counties bordering the river on the east

Habitat: Dry, sandy, gravelly or rocky slopes of mixed prairie

Flowers: Large, nodding, greenish-white flowers, sometimes tinged with purple, arranged in spikes (elongated clumps)

Height: 1 - 4 feet

Blooms: Mid-June to late July

Family name: Agave (Agavaceae)

Other names: Soapweed or Spanish bayonet

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: The Yucca moth is the only insect that can pollinate this plant. After pollination the moth lays its eggs on the flower. As larvae hatch, they feed on a few of the developing seeds.

Harebell

(Campanula rotundifolia)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Moist prairie and open woodlands

Flowers: Small bell-shaped, bluish-purple

Height: 4 - 18 inches

Blooms: Mid-June to mid-August

Family name: Bluebell (Campanulaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting facts:

Similar introduced species grow in road ditches and disturbed areas. The harebell is the only native bluebell.



Spiderwort

(Tradescantia spp.)

Distribution: Southern half of state

Habitat: Moist prairie, road ditches and light-textured soils

Flowers: Most often lavender and about the size of a quarter

Height: 4 - 16 inches

Blooms: Late May to early August

Family name: Spiderwort (Commelinaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting facts:

Two species exist, the bracted spiderwort (*T. Bracteata*) and the prairie spiderwort (*T. Occidentalis*). The main difference being the width of their leaves. When stems are broken, a stringy substance appears resembling a spider web. Plains Indians ate entire plants in salads or used it for cooking.





Picklepear Cactus

(*Opuntia* spp.)

Distribution: Western two-thirds of state

Habitat: Gravelly, rocky or sandy mixed-grass prairie hillsides or south slopes

Flowers: Yellow to pink to red in color, approximately 2 - 3 inches in diameter

Height: Up to 6 - 8 inches

Blooms: Mid-June to mid-July

Family name: Cactus (Cactaceae)

Other names: Plains pricklypear

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Three species occur, plains (*O.* Polycantha), bigroot (*O.* Macrorhiza) and fragile (*O.* Fragilis). Abundance of all increased with drought and grazing.



Silverleaf Scurfpea

(*Psoralea argophylla*)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Prairie hillsides, steep slopes and well-drained flats

Flowers: Small bluish-purple in clusters at the end of stems, each flower under 1/8 inch

Height: 1 - 2 feet

Blooms: June to September

Family name: Legume (Fabaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Many Native American tribes made tea for constipation and as a treatment for horse wounds. Eaten occasionally by deer and pronghorn.

Meadow Anemone

(Anemone canadensis)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Woods, wet prairies, and meadows

Flowers: Contain 5 bright white sepals 2 inches in diameter

Height: From 8 - 30 inches

Blooms: End of May, June and July

Family name: Ranunculaceae

Other names: Canada anemone

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Was used medically by North American Indigenous people as an astringent and as a styptic for wounds, sores and nosebleeds.



Scarlet Gaura

(Gaura coccinea)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland prairies

Flowers: Four white to red petals with many flowers per stem

Height: 8 inches

Blooms: End of May through August

Family name: Evening primrose

Other names: Waving butterfly (from the movement of the flower petals in the slightest breeze), scarlet bee-blossum.





Dotted Blazing Star

(Liatris punctata)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland prairies

Flowers: Light purple on unbranched, thick, spike-like main stock

Height: 8 - 40 inches

Blooms: August to October

Family name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Other names: Grayfeather

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: The deep taproot of this plant was used by Plains Indians for healing wounds, swelling, bladder trouble, diarrhea and gonorrhea. Butterflies flock to this flower to feed on its nectar.



Wild Bergamot

(Monarda fistulosa)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Locally common on moist to medium prairies, wooded draws and thickets

Flowers: Lavender-pink in color, flowers occur in dense clusters at the end of a stem, foliage has mint odor, square stem and opposite leaves, plants occur in colonies

Height: 2 - 4 feet

Blooms: July and early August

Family name: Mint (Lamiaceae)

Other names: Horsemint or beebalm

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Plains Indians made tea from these plants to treat intestinal ailments and skin eruptions. Foliage used to scent closets, drawers, pillows, etc. Also used in the popular Earl Gray tea.

Leadplant

(*Amorpha canescens*)

Distribution: Statewide except extreme south and northwest

Habitat: Prairies with big and little bluestem, upland prairies, roadsides, and open woodlands

Flowers: Violet in color, on spikes accented with golden yellow anthers

Height: 1 - 3 feet

Blooms: Mid-June to late July

Family Name: Legume (Fabaceae)

Other Names: Prairie shoestring

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Plant is shrubby with a deep root that can reach water deeper than 4 feet. Named from grayish color of plant. It has high wildlife value for food and nesting and is an indicator of good rangeland. Plains Indians smoked the leaves and made tea.



Goldenrod

(*Solidago spp*)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland and lowland prairies

Flowers: Many tiny yellow flowers in terminal clusters

Height: 8 - 24 inches

Blooms: July to September

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Late goldenrod (*S. Gigantea*), stiff golden (*S. Rigida*), Canada goldenrod (*S. Canadensis*) and Missouri goldenrod (*S. Missouriensis*) flowers look somewhat similar. Some American Indians chewed the leaves for sore throats and toothaches. They also made tea. Goldenrods are well known for being attacked by insects which lay eggs in the stem. Galls are round cases that protect a growing caterpillar.





Showy Milkweed

(Asclepias speciosa)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Moist prairie, open draws and ditches

Flowers: Pinkish-purple in color

Height: 20 - 40 inches

Blooms: Late June to August

Family Name: Milkweed (Asclepiadaceae)

Plant uses and other interesting facts:

Many similarly related species. Showy milkweed is often confused with common milkweed (*A. Syriaca*). The two species can hybridize. If eaten by livestock, milkweed can produce symptoms of poisoning and even death, but this is seldom a problem since it is distasteful. Monarch butterflies are totally reliant upon milkweed and lay their eggs on several milkweed species. As the larvae hatch they feed on the foliage which in turn protects them by making them distasteful and toxic to birds.



Tenpetal Blazingstar

(Mentzelia decapetala)

Distribution: Central and western prairie

Habitat: Dry, rocky hillsides

Flowers: 10 creamy colored petals, 2 - 3 inches long

Height: 20 - 40 inches

Blooms: July to September, opens late afternoon and closes by following morning

Family Name: Stickleaf (Loasaceae)

Other Names: Eveningstar, chalklily or tenpetal mentzelia

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: This plant has very little ethnic importance. Like the yucca, a night flying moth is responsible for pollination.

Rocky Mountain Bee-Plant

(Cleome serrulata)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Sandy, upland prairie soils and roadsides

Flowers: Bright pink, pinkish-purple to lavender in globe shapes at end of stalk

Height: 2 - 5 feet

Blooms: Mid-June to early September

Family Name: Caper (Capparaceae)

Other Names: Bee spiderflower, stink-flower or pink bee-plant

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Plains Indians boiled leaves to eat and ground seeds into flour. Bees and other insects frequent this plant and songbirds eat the seeds. This is an annual plant, meaning it requires reseeding each season.



Wild Licorice

(Glycyrrhiza lepidota)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Common in moister prairie areas, along streams, depressions and wetland edges

Flowers: Yellow-white in color, arranged in spikes

Height: 18 - 36 inches, appears shrubby, old stems become woody

Blooms: June and August

Family Name: Legume (Fabaceae)

Other Names: American licorice

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Deer eat the foliage, birds and rodents eat the seeds. Plains Indians used the roots in tea for flu and upset stomachs. Seeds are burr-like and cling to clothes and fur.





Lavender Hyssop

(Agastache foeniculum)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Common in woods, moist shrubby areas and around wetlands

Flowers: Blueish-purple petals formed in clusters

Height: 2 - 4 feet

Blooms: Mid June –mid September

Family Name: Mint (square stems)

Other Names: Anise hyssop, licorice mint, fragrant giant

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Chippewa Indians made charms from lavender hyssop that they believed protected them from disease and enemies. Stems of the plant are square, and crushed leaves smell like anise. Great for attracting bees.



Curlycup Gumweed

(Grindelia squarrosa)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Roadsides, depleted rangelands, overgrazed pastures, abandon croplands and other disturbed areas

Flowers: Yellow in color, aster-like, located at the end of branched stems

Height: 8 - 36 inches

Blooms: July to late September

Family Name: Aster (Asteraceae)

Other Names: Curly-top Gumweed

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Curlycup gumweed is an invader species that is quite drought resistant. It often becomes abundant after a period of dryness. American Indians used gumweed extracts to treat asthma, bronchitis, colic and skin rashes. It is sticky to the touch.

Big Bluestem

(Andropogon gerardii)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Lowlands, tallgrass prairies

Description: Warm season perennial. Each stalk produces one or more, 3 to 6 fingered "turkey foot" spikes approximately 1 ½ to 4 inches long. The plant is green throughout the summer and turns rusty red with maturity.

Height: 3 - 7 feet

Other Names: Turkeyfoot

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Typifies the tall grass prairie. Omaha-Ponca Indians would use big bluestem to support earthen roofs.



Little Bluestem

(Andropogon scoparius)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Tallgrass, prairies, eastern and central mixed-grass prairie. Little bluestem can grow well on every soil texture over a wide range of pH's.

Description: Warm season perennial, bunchgrass. Spikes are fuzzy and fluffy white at maturity, attached along and at the end of the stem. Foliage reddens at maturity. Often exists in nearly pure stands.

Height: 1 - 3 feet

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Little bluestem is nutritious when young and readily eaten by livestock and hooved wildlife, but seems to be avoided when matures. It is often seeded with other native grasses for erosion control. Lakota Indians would rub the dried leaves and stems into soft fiber for moccasin insulation. Little bluestem is easy to pick out on the prairie in fall as it appears as a "carpet" or orangish-red compared to other grasses which appear yellowish-brown.





Indiangrass

(Sorghastrum nutans)

Distribution: Central and eastern North Dakota

Habitat: Commonly associated with big bluestem in deep soils

Description: Warm season perennial tallgrass. Seeds are in dense, elongated spikes at the ends of the stem. Golden-yellowish in color.

Height: 2 - 6 feet

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Indian grass is a favorite forage for livestock and makes good hay. Lakota name for Indiangrass translates to "red grass with fluffy light-colored end."



Sideoats Grama

(Bouteloua curtipendula)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Upland prairies, on weakly developed, calcareous and fine textured soils

Description: Warm-season midgrass. Seeds are arranged in one-sided spikes, which hang down along the stem. Plant may be slight reddish in late summer and fall.

Height: 8 - 24 inches

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Sideoats grama gets its name from its one sided seed spikes. It is commonly used in seed mixtures to restore native grasslands.

Blue Grama

(Bouteloua gracilis)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Most predominant on drier sites, short grass prairies, rolling uplands, medium and fine textured soil

Description: Short, warm-season, perennial, sod-like. Each stem has 1 - 3 comb-like, one-sided spikes, which are bluish-purple when young and straw-colored when mature.

Height: 4 - 18 inches

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Blue grama is nutritious and palatable to livestock and wildlife.



Junegrass

(Koeleria macrantha)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Mixed grass and short grass prairies

Description: Short-lived, cool-season, perennial bunchgrass. Occurs in clumps with narrow spike-like seed heads (2 - 5 inches long) that open slightly during pollination. Matures early in the season.

Height: 6 - 20 inches

Other Names: Prairie Junegrass

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Junegrass is forage for livestock and wildlife, but can easily be over-grazed because of its early maturation. As grazing pressure increases, its abundance decreases.





Green Needlegrass

(Stipa viridula)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Moist, mixed prairies, coarse and medium textured soils

Description: Cool-season, perennial bunchgrass

Height: 1 - 3 feet

Other Names: Speargrass

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Its name comes from the sharp-tipped, longhaired spikelets which develop in early June. It provides good forage when green, but spikes can cause injury to eyes, mouth and flesh of smaller animals (i.e. sheep). Injury can be avoided if grazed before hairs mature or after they are dropped.



Switchgrass

(Panicum virgatum)

Distribution: Statewide, more common in the southern counties

Habitat: Uplands and lowlands of tallgrass prairie

Description: Tall, warm-season perennial sod grass. Large teardrop-shaped spikelets arranged in 6 - 18 inch long, open spikes.

Height: Up to 40 inches

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Farming and grazing have reduced switchgrass. It is often used in prairie restoration with other tallgrass species and forbs. It provides excellent cover for nesting birds and usually remains standing tall in winter to also serve as winter cover.

Western Wheatgrass

(Agropyron smithii)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Moist, mixed grass prairie, clay to sandy soils, has a high tolerance for salty soil

Description: Cool-season perennial sod-forming grass. Seeds arranged in fairly tight spikes 1 - 6 inches long

Height: 12 - 30 inches

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Western wheatgrass is often associated with grama and needlegrass. It can be used by livestock and wildlife. Grouse, pheasants, rabbits and songbirds feed on its seeds.



Reed Canary

(Phalaris arundinacea)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Occurs in a wide variety of moisture conditions, but thrives on moist or wet soils. Wet meadows, wet prairies, streambanks and lake shores are places to find this grass.

Description: A cool-season perennial that can form sod by spreading rhizomes. Stems are hollow, leaf blades are flat and up to 16 inches in length.

Height: 2-8 feet tall

Plant uses and other interesting facts: First introduced from Europe for hay and livestock feed. Good for stabilizing floodways and other water conservation practices. Seeds are eaten by many songbirds and pheasants. Cover is good for deer, small mammals and birds.





Foxtail Barley

(Hordeum jubatum)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Rangelands, hayfields and disturbed grounds, quite salt-tolerant

Description: Cool-season, short-lived perennial. Seedhead has very characteristic drooping spikes with numerous fine, long, soft, straight hairs

Height: 8 - 30 inches

Other Names: Squirreltail barley

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Hairs from the seeds can cause mouth sores if grazed in hay. Lakota name means "one uses it to tickle the face."



Porcupine Grass

(Stipa spartea)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Although common, it is seldom abundant in a given area

Description: Similar to green needlegrass, but leafier and taller with spear-like seed heads

Height: Up to 4 feet

Plant uses and other interesting

facts: Nutritious and relished by livestock and grazing wildlife. To Pawnee Indians, porcupine grass was referred to as "hairbrush."

Smooth Bromegrass

(*Bromus inermis*)

Distribution: Statewide

Habitat: Fields, roadsides, waste areas, often invades native grasslands

Description: Perennial cool-season, sod grass. Spikelets are arranged in open spikes at end of stem

Height: Up to 4 feet tall

Other Names: Smooth brome

Plant uses and other interesting facts: Bromegrass was not found in North America until it was brought from Europe. It is very aggressive and forms sod unlike many natives which grow in clumps. Brome is generally not as beneficial to wildlife since it has weak stems which fall over under winter snow and become an unusable matt of vegetation preventing other beneficial plants from growing and leaving poor nesting cover for wildlife.



Bromegrass can be identified by the characteristic "W" which is found within the leaf.

Kentucky Bluegrass

(*Poa pratensis*)

Distribution: Statewide

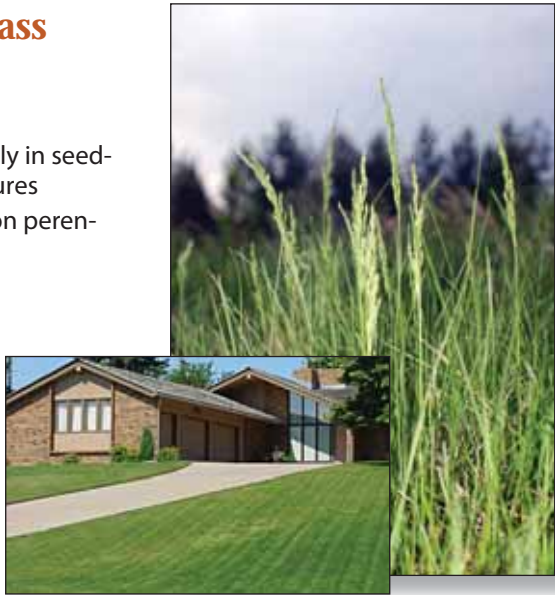
Habitat: Is used extensively in seeding urban lawns and pastures

Description: A cool-season perennial sod-forming grass

Height: 2 feet

Plant uses and other interesting facts:

Generally referred to as nonnative and very invasive. Provides good livestock forage during cool months. Provides marginal nesting and wildlife cover.



Kentucky bluegrass is the preferred grass for urban homeowners. Pesticides and fertilizers are routinely used on these areas which can have negative impacts to rivers, streams, the insect population and other wildlife resources.

Native wildflowers and grass plantings are a great way to.....



*conserve water,
save money*




*eliminate use of
pesticides and
fertilizers*



*beautify the
landscape*



*anchors and
stabilizes soils*




*provides wildlife
nesting cover*



*attracts
pollinating insects*

More benefits of prairie grasses and wildflowers



*improves water
quality*



*creates wildlife
habitat*

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