Prairie Wildflowers and Grasses

OF NORTH DAKOTA

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
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 hemi-parasite, 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.”

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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 emergencies, 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 angusifolia*)

**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, smallpox, 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 philadephicum*)

**Distribution:** Statewide, except southwest 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 pupurea*)

**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  
(*Rabtibida 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 Indians 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.

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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:** Gailardia  
**Plant uses and other interesting facts:** Used extensively in prairie restoration. Blackfoot Indians drank tea made from the root for gastroenteritis and applied the powered 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.
Picklypear 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 puncata*)

**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

(\textit{Amorpha canescens})

\textbf{Distribution}: Statewide except extreme south and northwest

\textbf{Habitat}: Prairies with big and little bluestem, upland prairies, roadsides, and open woodlands

\textbf{Flowers}: Violet in color, on spikes accented with golden yellow anthers

\textbf{Height}: 1 - 3 feet

\textbf{Blooms}: Mid-June to late July

\textbf{Family Name}: Legume (Fabaceae)

\textbf{Other Names}: Prairie shoestring

\textbf{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

(\textit{Solidago spp})

\textbf{Distribution}: Statewide

\textbf{Habitat}: Upland and lowland prairies

\textbf{Flowers}: Many tiny yellow flowers in terminal clusters

\textbf{Height}: 8 - 24 inches

\textbf{Blooms}: July to September

\textbf{Plant uses and other interesting facts}: Late goldenrod (\textit{S. Gigantean}), stiff golden (\textit{S. Rigidag}), Canada goldenrod (\textit{S. Canadensis}) and Missouri goldenrod (\textit{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 range-lands, 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.

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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 hoofed 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 overgrazed because of its early matura
tion. 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.”

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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.

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.

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

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
More benefits of prairie grasses and wildflowers

- anchors and stabilizes soils
- attracts pollinating insects
- improves water quality
- creates wildlife habitat
- provides wildlife nesting cover
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