

Minnesota's State Symbols

State Flag

The current state flag was approved in 1957 by the Minnesota State Legislature. It is royal blue, bordered with gold fringe. The state seal is in the center of the flag. Circling the seal are three dates woven into a wreath of lady's-slippers: 1819, when Fort Snelling was established; 1858, when Minnesota became the 32nd state in the union on May 11; and 1893, the year the original flag was adopted. There are 19 stars on the flag because Minnesota was the 19th state admitted to the union after the original 13. The top star is larger than the rest and represents Minnesota, the "North Star State."

State Gemstone

The Lake Superior agate was named the official gemstone in 1969. It is a quartz mineral called chalcedony with varying red, brown, gray, and white bands. Over a billion years ago, it was formed by fluids pulsing through porous volcanic rock in the region that is now Lake Superior. These gemstones were dispersed when glaciers tore at the rock and moved across Minnesota. You can find them on beaches and in gravel pits in the northeast to north-central part of the state.

It is popular to polish agates to a high sheen, accentuating their bands, especially for making jewelry.

State Mushroom

The morel (*Morchella esculenta*) became the state mushroom in 1984. It is a highly desirable, edible mushroom sought after by mushroom hunters. Morels have an unusual, spongelike appearance and are sometimes called "sponge mushrooms." Their physiology is unusual as well, having only recently evolved—about 100,000 years ago—from a yeast. As a result, morels are more delicate than other mushrooms. Morels live in and on the edge of deciduous forests.

State Bird

The common loon (*Gavia immer*), also known as the "great northern diver," was chosen Minnesota's state bird in 1961. The loon is a large black and white bird with deep green-tinted feathers and dark red eyes. It has a wingspan of up to 5 feet and body length of up to 3 feet. The loon is an excellent swimmer and diver, and can fly at high speeds. Its loud, haunting call is easily identified over Minnesota lakes in the summer. In the winter it flies to warmer ocean water on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

State Soil

Lester soil is named after the city of Lester Prairie and became the state soil in 2012. This soil formed on hills of debris left by melting glaciers about 10,000 years ago. Lester soil is young, fertile, and contains abundant natural plant nutrients. Often located on slopes, it drains water well and is less dense, making it perfect for growing pasture grasses and crops such as corn and soybeans.

State Sport

Ice hockey was named the official state sport in 2009. Minnesota is widely regarded as a state where hockey players grow and thrive, beginning with vibrant youth leagues. The United States Hockey Hall of Fame Museum is located in Eveleth, Minnesota.

State Song

"Hail! Minnesota," 1945.

Minnesota, hail to thee!
Hail to thee our state so dear!
Thy light shall ever be
A beacon bright and clear.

Thy sons and daughters true
Will proclaim thee near and far.
They shall guard thy fame
And adore thy name;
Thou shalt be their Northern Star.

Like the stream that bends to sea,
Like the pine that seeks the blue,
Minnesota, still for thee,
Thy sons are strong and true.

From thy woods and waters fair,
From thy prairies waving far,
At thy call they throng,
With their shout and song,
Hailing thee their Northern Star.

State Butterfly

The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) became the state butterfly in 2000. Every fall monarchs migrate great distances along the Mississippi River, all the way to central Mexico. Monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains migrate to California. Millions swarm in small areas and completely cover trees.

Monarchs mate in late winter and begin heading north again in March. Females lay eggs on milkweed plants along the way, then die. The larvae feed on the milkweed plant and absorb a substance that is distasteful to predators. Young butterflies continue migrating north to their parents' origin.

State Tree

The red pine (*Pinus resinosa*) was chosen the official state tree in 1953 to recognize its important role in Minnesota's history, economy, and environment. Some of the tallest red pines in Minnesota are located in Itasca State Park. Many are over 120 feet tall and more than 300 years old.

The red pine has a straight trunk, reddish-brown bark, and needles 4 to 6 inches long, growing in pairs. It is usually bare of branches for two-thirds of the way up the trunk, with a rounded top or "crown."

State Fruit

The Honeycrisp apple (*Malus pumila* cultivar Honeycrisp) became Minnesota's state fruit in 2006 thanks to petitioning from students at Anderson Elementary School in Bayport, Minnesota. This apple was developed by the University of Minnesota's apple breeding program in 1960 and released in 1991. Ever since, this exceptionally crisp and juicy fruit is consistently ranked as one of the highest quality apples due to its sweetness, firmness, and tartness. Honeycrisp apple trees are hardy and able to survive normal Minnesota winters.

State Drink

Milk became the official drink in 1984. Milk was chosen to promote the American Dairy Association and to raise awareness of dairy products in the state. Minnesota consistently ranks in the top 10 states that produces milk from dairy cows, averaging 9.5 billion pounds of milk annually.

State Seal and Motto

Minnesota's first governor, Henry Sibley, chose the design for the state seal and picked the state's motto, which were officially adopted by the legislature in 1861. The seal depicts a farmer plowing a field and an American Indian riding a horse. The stump is a symbol of the importance of Minnesota's lumber industry. The state's motto, *L'Etoile du Nord*, is French for "Star of the North" and is the basis for Minnesota's nickname, "The North Star State."

State Grain

Wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*) or manomin, a unique resource in Minnesota, was adopted as the official state grain in 1977. A staple food of the Ojibwe for centuries, it has cultural and economic significance.

Minnesota produces over half of the world's hand-harvested wild rice—Canada produces the rest. Wild rice occurs naturally in shallow lakes and streams and ripens in late August or early September. The grain is harvested traditionally from canoes by bending the plant over the boat and lightly raking it with a hand-held wooden flail. Some wild rice is grown commercially in flooded fields. At the end of the growing season the field is drained and the grain is harvested mechanically.

State Flower

The showy lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*) was adopted as the state flower in 1902. The lady's-slipper is a member of the orchid family and classified as a perennial herb. Its habitat is swamps, fens, bogs, and damp woods. This rare wildflower grows slowly, taking 4 to 16 years to produce its first flower. It may live as long as 50 years. The showy lady's-slipper blooms in late June and early July. Since 1925 this wildflower has been protected by state law, making it illegal to pick or collect them.

State Fish

The walleye (*Stizostedion v. vitreum*) became the state fish in 1965. Due to their elusive behavior and quality of fillets, walleyes are the most popular fish to catch in Minnesota. They average 1 to 2 pounds but can grow as large as 18 pounds. The name walleye comes from its pearly eyes—caused by a reflective layer of pigment that helps them see at night or in murky waters. They range in color from dark olive brown to yellowish gold. They prefer clean, windswept lakes in northern Minnesota.

State Muffin

The blueberry muffin became the state muffin in 1988. Wild blueberries are native to northeastern Minnesota, growing in bogs, on hillsides, and in cut-over forested areas. These small, sweet berries keep their color, shape, and texture during baking.

State Photograph

"Grace" became the Minnesota state photograph in 2002. It was originally taken in 1918 by Eric Enstrom at his photography studio in Bovey, Minnesota, and has become a widely recognized image that hangs in many homes, restaurants, and churches across America. The photo shows an elderly, white-haired man seated at a table with his head bowed, giving thanks for the simple meal before him.