

Wildflowers of Minnesota's Northern Prairies





Carolina Delphinium

Delphinium carolinianum subsp. *virescens*

Flowers at top of stem; pale blue with purple spots and a 1 inch tubular spur. Perennial. Single stem up to 3 feet tall. Leaves alternate; palmately divided. Wet to mesic to dry prairies; ditches. Blooms early June. Toxic to cattle.



Pasqueflower

Anemone patens var. *multifida*

Flowers tulip-shaped, with 5 to 8 lavender, petal-like sepals and yellow centers. Leaves long-stemmed, deeply divided into narrow, lobed/toothed segments. Fruits with feathery plumes. Dry prairies; dry, rocky, gravelly sites. Flowers open in April shortly after snowmelt, before leaves emerge. Used medicinally by American Indians. State flower of South Dakota and provincial flower of Manitoba.



Prairie Turnip

Pedimelum esculentum

Light bluish flowers in a dense spike. Alternate leaves palmately compound. Oblong pods (fruits). Legume to 1 foot tall. Dry prairies. Blooms early summer. Late in the season, an abscission layer forms near the ground allowing the plant to tumble across the prairie, scattering its seeds. Also known as Indian breadroot, for the enlarged root harvested and eaten by Plains Indians.



Blue-eyed Grass

Sisyrinchium spp.

Star-like flowers about ½-inch wide with blue tepals (petals and sepals that look alike) and a yellow center. Fruit is a small, round capsule. Overall plant is light green. Up to about a foot tall with grass-like leaves. Several species found in prairies. Blooms in May-June. Delicate members of the Iris Family.



Silverleaf Scurfpea

Pedimelum argophyllum

Clusters of small, deep blue flowers. Silvery-haired leaves; alternate, palmately compound (3 to 5 leaflets). Legume to 2 feet tall. Plant tumbles about, scattering seeds on its dry prairie habitat after an abscission layer forms near the ground in the fall. Blooms June-August.

Leadplant

Amorpha canescens

Dense spikes of tiny violet flowers; each flower with 10 protruding orange stamens. Stems single or branching. Leaves divided into narrow, elliptical leaflets. Leaves and stems covered with fine hairs, giving the plant a whitish-gray appearance. Shrubby, to 3 feet tall. Dry to mesic prairies, savannas. Blooms June-August. Leaves used medicinally by American Indians.



Downy Gentian

Gentiana puberulenta

Flowers 1½ inches across at top of stem; bluish purple with 5 spreading, pointed lobes. Smooth, opposite, pointed leaves with a single prominent vein. Low perennial, to 1 foot tall. Dry to mesic prairies. Blooms September. Genus said to be named after King Gentius of Illyria.



Lesser Fringed Gentian

Gentianopsis procera

Deep blue, showy flowers; petals joined to form a tube with 4 separate, fringed lobes at the top. Leaves opposite and narrow. Plant to 2 feet tall. Wet, often calcareous, prairies and meadows. Blooms in August-September. One of two species of fringed gentian in Minnesota.



Bottle Gentian

Gentiana andrewsii

Bottle-shaped, bluish violet to white flowers at top of stem. Shiny, opposite, pointed leaves that become larger going down the stem. Perennial to 2 feet tall. Stout stems. Wet prairies, edges of woods. Blooms August-September. Pollinated by bumblebees.



Silky Aster

Symphotrichum sericeum

Flower heads to 1 inch across with purple rays and yellow disk. Perennial to 2 feet tall with widely branching stems and alternate leaves covered with silvery hairs. Lower stem is leafless by late summer. Dry calcareous prairie. Blooms August. The silvery hairs feel silky, hence the common name.



BLUE

PURPLE



Bracted Spiderwort

Tradescantia bracteata

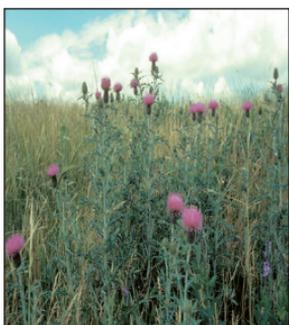
Small clusters of inch-wide, medium purple flowers at top of stem, subtended by two leaf-like bracts. Long, narrow, alternate, somewhat keeled leaves. Plants up to 3 feet tall. Found in sandy or gravelly prairies. Blooms May-June. Once considered a cure for spider bites. The common name comes from the thread-like sap of the stem-like spider's webbing.



New England Aster

Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

Purple-rayed flower heads with yellow disks. Perennial to 4 feet tall with stout, bristly stem and numerous clasping leaves. Wet prairies; ditches. Blooms August-September. One of the showiest prairie asters. Leaves used historically to cure skin rashes.



Flodman's Thistle

Cirsium flodmanii

Flowering head 1 to 1½ inches across; small rose-purple flowers. White-wooly on undersides of its deeply lobed leaves. Plants to 3 feet high. Mesic to dry prairies. Blooms July-September. Native thistle. The small fruits (achenes) of thistles have plumes of soft bristles (the pappus) used by American Goldfinches as nesting material.



Ground Plum

Astragalus crassicaarpus var. *crassicaarpus*

Large violet to white flowers clustered at branch tips. Leaflets slightly folded, hairy beneath. Sprawling low perennial with numerous trailing stems and pinnately compound leaves. Fruit 1 inch across, purplish, juicy, edible when immature in July; dries to brown husk. Dry calcareous prairies. Blooms May-June. Important food of prairie-dwelling humans and other animals.



Wild Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

Tubular pinkish or lavender flowers arranged in dense, globe-shaped heads at tops of stems. Leaves opposite, to 5 inches long, toothed, lance-shaped. Perennial plant 2 to 4 feet tall; often forms colonies. Dry prairies, thickets, old fields. Blooms July-August. All plant parts have a minty fragrance. Leaves and roots used medicinally by American Indians. Also known as Beebalm.

Blazing Star

Liatris spp.

Dense spikes of showy, rose-purple flower heads. Bracts at base of flower heads used in identification. Leaves grass-like with a white mid-vein; 2 to 6 inches long. Minnesota has several species of this perennial plant. Heights vary. Habitat is usually open: dry, mesic or moist prairies; grassy meadows. Blooms July-August.



Purple Prairie Clover

Dalea purpurea var. *purpurea*

Flower heads dense, cylindrical, made of numerous magenta flowers; each flower with 5 protruding orange stamens. Flowers bloom from bottom of spike to top. Leaves alternate, compound, with 3 to 9 very narrow leaflets. Perennial legume with slender stems, 1 to 3 feet tall, rising from a woody crown. Dry to mesic prairies. Blooms July-September. Intolerant of grazing.



Prairie Phlox

Phlox pilosa var. *fulgida*

Flowers pink-purple, about 3/4 inch wide, in a loosely branched cluster at the top of the hairy stem. Leaves opposite, narrow, up to 3 inches long, and tapered to a sharp point. Up to 2 feet tall. Dry to mesic prairies. Blooms June-July. Used by hummingbirds and butterflies.



Large-flowered Beard Tongue

Penstemon grandiflorus

Flowers up to 2 inches long, purplish, tubular, flaring into 2 upper and 3 lower lobes; arranged in groups of 2 to 6 on upper stem with a pair of small leafy structures below each group. Leaves rounded, opposite, clasping. Leaves and stems waxy; bluish-green. Stout, perennial plant to 3 1/2 feet tall. Upland prairies; often sandy soil. Blooms July-August.



Narrow-leaved Purple Coneflower

Echinacea angustifolia

Single showy flower head with purplish, drooping ray flowers and brown, dome-shaped disk. Elongate basal leaves with prominent parallel veins. Bristly stems to 2 feet tall. Perennial. Dry to mesic or gravelly prairies. Blooms July. Echinacea comes from the Greek *echos* for sea urchin, which the prickly disk resembles. Medicinal plant of Plains Indians.





Violet Wood Sorrel

Oxalis violacea

Light purple, 5-petaled flowers in loose clusters. Leaves are shamrock-shaped with 3 heart-shaped, folded leaflets containing oxalic acid, which gives them a sour taste. Perennial plant to 6 inches tall. Mesic prairies. Blooms June. High in vitamin A. Used as food by American Indians.



Wild Rose

Rosa spp.

Flowers pink to deep rose, 2 to 3 inches across, with 5 petals; fragrant. Leaves compound with 5 to 11 leaflets. Stems smooth to prickly. Fruit (hips) fleshy, shiny red, with many hard seeds. Shrubby plant to 3 feet tall. Open prairies, uncultivated fields, roadsides. Blooms June-July. Traditionally used by American Indians for food and medicine. Hips high in vitamins A and C. State flower of North Dakota.



Milkweed

Asclepias spp.

Clusters of pink to white, fragrant flowers with reflexed petals and 5-part crown. Leaves opposite or whorled, often pubescent. Fruit is elongate pod filled with silky-plumed seeds. Perennial, with milky sap. Prairies, old fields, ditches. Blooms June-August. Leaves are essential food for monarch butterfly caterpillars. Named after Asklepios, Greek god of medicine.



Wild Onion

Allium spp.

Single, terminal cluster of pinkish flowers with 6 tepals (petals and sepals that look alike). Basal, linear leaves. Fruit a small, round capsule. Mesic and dry prairies. Blooms summer. Plant arises from a bulb resembling a small, domestic onion. Bulb used by American Indians as food and medicine. Strong, onion-like odor.



Wolfberry

Symphoricarpos occidentalis

Flowers pinkish, bell-shaped. Oval, opposite leaves that are white-pubescent beneath. Low shrub. Forms dense colonies. Berries white but blacken with age; persist over winter; eaten by Sharp-tailed Grouse and Prairie Chickens. Dry prairies. Blooms June-August.

Prairie Smoke

Geum triflorum

Flowers nod; have reddish sepals and pale petals. Blooms in groups of 3 on stalks held above leaves. Fuzzy leaves; lower leaves pinnately compound, with up to 17 leaflets. Low perennial, often in patches. Fruits have long, feathery plumes that resemble smoke. Dry, gravelly prairies. Blooms April-May.



Wood Lily

Lilium philadelphicum

Large, bright reddish-orange, upward-facing flower at top of 2-foot tall stem. The petals and sepals are purple-spotted and often yellow toward the base. Numerous narrow leaves, the upper ones arranged in whorls. Perennial. Moist prairies, openings, woodland edges, roadsides. Blooms June-July.



Blanket-flower

Gaillardia aristata

Showy, single, 3-inch flower heads at top of stem. Yellow ray flowers with reddish bases, 3-lobed tips; brownish disk. Leaves basal. Stem and leaves rough-hairy. Perennial to 2 feet tall. Dry prairies. Blooms July-August. A Minnesota state special concern plant. Similar to ornamental varieties.



Maximilian's Sunflower

Helianthus maximiliani

Clusters of 4-inch, yellow-rayed flower heads near top of plant. Distinctive narrow, folded leaves curve downward. White-hairy stems. Perennial, to 6 feet tall; grows in colonies. Wet to mesic prairies. Blooms July-August. Very common. Named after its discoverer, a German prince.



Black-eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta var. *pulcherrima*

Flower heads with yellow ray flowers and small, dark brown disk flowers. Coarsely hairy plant with alternate, lance-shaped leaves. Plants usually about 2 feet tall. Dry to mesic prairies and roadsides. Blooms June-September. Parts of plant used historically for medicinal teas. Attracts butterflies.



RED

YELLOW



Ox-eye

Heliopsis helianthoides var. *scabra*

Showy, 3-inch, yellow-rayed flower heads on individual stalks. Opposite, stalked, coarsely toothed, triangular leaves. Smooth stems. Perennial to 4 feet tall. Wet prairies, edges of thickets. Blooms June-August. Also called False Sunflower.



Stiff Goldenrod

Solidago rigida

Showy heads of yellow flowers open in late summer and form a flattened cluster at top of plant. Rather coarse plants to 3 feet tall with broad, thick, alternate, slightly clasping stem leaves and long-stalked basal leaves. Common in dry prairies. Blooms August.



Autumn Sneezeweed

Helenium autumnale

Flower heads 1½ inches across, clustered at top of stem; yellow rays have lobed tips; disk is spherical or knoblike. Single, leafy, winged stem. Perennial to 4 feet tall. Wet prairies and ditches. Blooms July-August. Reportedly toxic to livestock.



Shrubby Cinquefoil

Dasiphora fruticosa

Yellow, 5-petaled flowers about an inch across. Palmately compound leaves (5 to 7 narrow leaflets). Bushy, branched shrub to 3 feet tall. Wet brush prairies, especially on calcareous soil. Blooms June-August. Used medicinally by American Indians. This species' cultivars used in many ornamental plantings.



Hoary Puccoon, Narrow-leaved Puccoon

Lithospermum canescens, *L. incisum*

Petals orange or yellow, joined to form a tube but with upper segments (lobes) that appear as separate petals. (Upper segments fringed and pale yellow in Narrow-leaved Puccoon.) Plants hairy, up to 1½ feet tall. Dry to mesic prairies. Bloom May-June. Pale nutlets sacred to some American Indian tribes. Roots used by some tribes as source for red dye.

Golden Alexanders, Heart-leaved Alexanders

Zizia aurea, *Zizia aptera*

Tiny yellow flowers in slightly domed clusters. Alternate, compound leaves, with lower leaflets further divided into segments. (Basal leaves of Heart-leaved Alexanders are simple and heart-shaped.) Up to 3 feet tall. Wet to dry-mesic prairies. Bloom June. Named after German botanist Johann Ziz.



Curly-cup Gumweed

Grindelia squarrosa

Yellow flower heads at the ends of branches. Curved, sticky bracts at base of flower head, hence the common name. Leaves alternate, toothed, clasping, sticky. Biennial, to 3 feet tall, usually branching. Mesic to dry prairies. Blooms July-August. Sap used by American Indians to treat various respiratory diseases and rashes. Good food source for upland birds.



Riddell's Goldenrod

Solidago riddellii

Tiny yellow flowers in a dense, domed cluster at top of plant. Leaves are distinctive; linear, folded lengthwise, and arched away from the stem. Plants up to 3 feet tall. Wet to mesic prairies, calcareous fens. Blooms August.



Wood Betony

Pedicularis canadensis

Flowers densely clustered at top of stem; yellowish tubular corolla arched over lower lip. Basal rosette of pinnately lobed, crinkly leaves. Leaves and stem pubescent. Perennial, to 1 foot tall. Dry to mesic prairies, dry sandy woods. Blooms May-June. May be partially parasitic.



Sage

Artemisia spp.

Flower heads inconspicuous, yellowish. Leaves often grayish on upper sides. Stems frequently branching, to 30 inches tall, leafy. Commonly found in patches in dry prairies, old fields, and along roadsides. Blooms August-September. Various species also known as wormwood. Often aromatic. Used by American Indians for medicinal and ceremonial purposes.



YELLOW

YELLOW



Canada Milk-vetch

Astragalus canadensis

Flowers pea-like, cream-colored, and arranged in dense, long-stemmed, spike-like clusters. Leaves compound with 13 to 27 oblong leaflets, each leaflet about 1 inch long. Plant to about 3 feet tall. Fruits small, rounded, bean-like pods. Prairie-woodland margins, low areas, along streams. Blooms June-July.



Downy Paintbrush

Castilleja sessiliflora

Flowers are yellowish, large, densely clustered, and surrounded by greenish bracts and leaves at the top of the plant. Gray-green, leafy plant up to a foot tall. Dry prairies. Blooms June. Semi-parasitic on roots of some plants, mainly grasses.



Wild Licorice

Glycyrrhiza lepidota

Pale yellow, pea-type flowers in dense clusters. Pinnately compound leaves with 11 to 19 leaflets. Plants to 3 feet tall. Fruits about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long, covered with hooked prickles, turning brown by late summer. Mesic and wet-mesic prairies. Blooms June-August. Related to the European commercial licorice plant.



White Camas

Zigadenus elegans

Tall panicle of white flowers which include 6 tepals (sepals and petals that look alike). Leaves (mostly clustered around base), are long and narrow. Perennial, about 3 feet tall. Wet prairies. Blooms early July. Member of the Lily Family. Poisonous.



Western Prairie Fringed Orchid

Platanthera praeclara

Creamy white flowers in elongate clusters (racemes) of a few to more than 20; lip divided into 3 fringed segments; spur up to 2 inches long; fragrant. Narrowly oval lower leaves strongly clasping the stem, smaller upper leaves. Stem 1 to 2 feet tall. Wet to wet-mesic prairies. Blooms July. Northwestern Minnesota's only Federal Endangered plant. Moth pollinated.

White Prairie Clover

Dalea candida

Numerous small white flowers arranged in dense cylindrical spikes. Flowers bloom from bottom of spike to top. Leaves alternate, compound, with 3 to 9 narrow leaflets. Stem slender. Drought tolerant, deep-rooted. Perennial legume. Dry to mesic prairie. Blooms July-August. Somewhat less common than purple prairie clover. Used by American Indians for food, tea, and medicine.



Small White Lady's Slipper

Cypripedium candidum

Single flower with white inflated pouch, 2 long curly brownish petals at sides, 1 narrow sepal above and 2 fused sepals below pouch. Has 3 or 4 slightly folded, ascending leaves. Stems up to 1 foot tall, often clumped. Perennial. Calcareous groundwater seeps, wet prairies. Blooms early June. Rare; a Minnesota state special concern plant.



Culver's Root

Veronicastrum virginicum

Dense, tapering spike of small, white flowers. Well-separated whorls of 3 to 8 lance-shaped leaves. Perennial about 3 to 4 feet tall. Mesic prairies. Blooms July. Roots historically used as a cathartic under the name Culver's physic.



Wild Plum

Prunus americana

Fragrant, white flowers. Elliptical leaves with sharply serrate margins. Branches have false thorns. Shrub 3 to 10 feet tall. Mesic to dry prairies; roadside edges. Blooms April-May. Edible fruits ripen in August-September. Plums form thickets on the prairie and provide food and shelter for wildlife.



Virginia Mountain Mint

Pycnanthemum virginianum

Compact cluster of small, white flowers. Leaves opposite, narrow, pointed at tip and rounded at base, smaller near top of plant. Four-angled stem typical of the Mint Family. Stem leafy, to 3 feet tall. Found in a range of prairie habitats, wet to dry. Blooms July-September. Fragrant; minty odor when leaves are crushed.



Wildflowers of Minnesota's Northern Prairies highlights 51 of the most common prairie wildflowers of northwestern Minnesota. About 500 species of native flowering plants are found in this region.

Approximately 1 percent of Minnesota's original tallgrass prairie remains. Northwestern Minnesota prairie types range from wet to dry. Some of our most threatened are dry prairies, while some of our rarest are mesic prairies. These are moderate in moisture and well-suited to agriculture; most were tilled by early European settlers.

Public agencies, including the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), and the conservation group The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have worked hard to protect our remaining native prairie. MNDNR scientific and natural areas, state parks, and wildlife management areas; USFWS national wildlife refuges and waterfowl protection areas; and TNC preserves dot the landscape of western Minnesota and are excellent places to see prairie wildflowers and wildlife. Contact a local MNDNR, USFWS, or TNC field office for information on prairies nearby.

Minnesota's prairie wildflowers are lovely to look at...but please leave them in the ground. Most public agencies do not permit the removal of wildflowers from land managed by the agency, and certain plants (including all orchids and lilies) are given some protection by Minnesota Statute 18H.18, known as the Wildflower Act. In addition, Minnesota has a list of state endangered, threatened, and special concern species. Contact MNDNR (1-888-646-6367) to request a copy of this list.

Photographs were provided by Steve Mortensen; ColdSnap Photography for the MNDNR Scientific & Natural Areas Program; MNDNR's Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program; MNDNR's Minnesota Biological Survey; Dan Svedarsky; Ross Hier; Chuck Vukonich; Robert Dana; George-Ann Maxson; Bill Glass; and North Dakota State University.

The production of this brochure was made possible through a partnership that included the USFWS; the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), MNDNR, through the Scientific & Natural Areas Program and Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program; TNC; the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Leech Lake Reservation Division of Resources Management; Enbridge Energy; Kaste Seed; Bergeson Nursery; the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society; Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center; Ottertail Wild Ones; the Fargo-Moorhead Audubon Society; the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society; and WesMin Resource Conservation and Development.



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Cover Photograph: Prairie Coneflower *Ratibida columnifera*

Flowering heads with bright yellow ray flowers that are usually reflexed and an elongate, columnar disk ½ to 1½ inches high with small brown flowers. Alternate leaves divided into narrow lobes. About 1 to 2 feet tall. Member of the Aster Family. Dry prairies. Blooms June-September. Also known as Mexican hat.

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