

Wildflowers of Minnesota's Northern Prairies highlights 51 of the most common wildflowers of the prairies of northwestern Minnesota. About 500 species of native flowering plants are found here.

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

Public agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the conservation group The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have worked hard to protect our remaining native prairie. DNR 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 DNR, 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 17.28, known as the Wildflower Act. In addition, Minnesota has a list of state endangered, threatened, and special concern species. Contact the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (1-888-646-6367) to request a copy of this list.

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

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Cover Photograph: Prairie Coneflower *Ratibida columnifera*

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

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Wildflowers of Minnesota's Northern Prairies





Prairie Larkspur

Delphinium carolinianum var. *virescens*

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



Pasqueflower

Anemone patens var. *multifida*

Flowers open in April shortly after snow-melt, before leaves emerge; 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. Used medicinally by American Indians. State flower of South Dakota and provincial flower of Manitoba.



Prairie Turnip

Pediomelum esculentum

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



Blue-eyed Grass

Sisyrinchium spp.

Light green, delicate members of the Iris Family up to about a foot tall with grass-like leaves. Star-like flowers about 1/2 inch wide with blue tepals (petals and sepals that look alike) and a yellow center. Fruit is a small, round capsule. Several species found in prairies. Blooms in May-June.



Silverleaf Scurfpea

Pediomelum argophyllum

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

Leadplant

Amorpha canescens

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



Downy Gentian

Gentiana puberulenta

Low perennial, to 1 foot tall. Smooth, opposite, pointed leaves with a single prominent vein. Flowers 1 1/2 inches across at top of stem; bluish purple with 5 spreading, pointed lobes. Dry to mesic prairies. Blooms September. Genus said to be named after King Gentius of Illyria.



Lesser Fringed Gentian

Gentianopsis procera

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



Bottle Gentian

Gentiana andrewsii

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



Silky Aster

Aster sericeus

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





Bracted Spiderwort

Tradescantia bracteata

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



New England Aster

Aster novae-angliae

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



Flodman's Thistle

Cirsium flodmanii

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



Ground Plum

Astragalus crassicaulis

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



Wild Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

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

Blazing Star

Liatris spp.

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



Purple Prairie Clover

Dalea purpurea

Perennial legume with slender stems, 1 to 3 feet tall, rising from a woody crown. Flowers July-September. Flower heads dense, cylindrical, made up 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. Dry to mesic prairies. Intolerant of grazing. Used by American Indians for food, tea, and medicine.



Prairie Phlox

Phlox pilosa var. *fulgida*

Up to 2 feet tall. Leaves opposite, narrow, up to 3 inches long, and tapered to a sharp point. Flowers pink-purple, about ¾ inch wide, in a loosely branched cluster at the top of the hairy stem. Dry to mesic prairies. Blooms June-July.



Large-flowered Beard-tongue

Penstemon grandiflorus

Stout, perennial plant to 3½ feet tall. Blooms July-August; flowers up to 2 inches long, purplish, tubular, flaring into 2 upper and 3 lower lobes; arranged in groups of 2 to 6 at upper part of stem with a pair of small leafy structures below each group. Leaves rounded, opposite, clasping. Leaves and stems waxy, bluish-green. Upland prairies, often sandy soil. American Indian toothache remedy.



Narrow-leaved Purple Coneflower

Echinacea pallida var. *angustifolia*

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





Violet Wood Oxalis

Oxalis violacea

Perennial plant to 6 inches tall. Mesic prairies. Blooms in June with 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. High in vitamin A. Used as food by American Indians.



Wild Rose

Rosa spp.

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



Milkweed

Asclepias spp.

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



Wild Onion

Allium spp.

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



Wolfberry

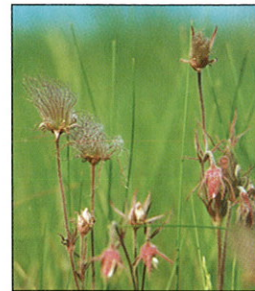
Symphoricarpos occidentalis

Low shrub. Forms dense colonies. Oval, opposite leaves that are white-pubescent beneath. Flowers pinkish, bell-shaped. 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

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



Wood Lily

Lilium philadelphicum var. *andinum*

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. Blooms June-July. Moist prairies, openings, woodland edges, roadsides.



Blanketflower

Gaillardia aristata

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



Maximilian's Sunflower

Helianthus maximiliani

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



Black-eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta var. *pulcherrima*

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





Ox-eye

Heliopsis helianthoides var. *scabra*

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



Stiff Goldenrod

Solidago rigida

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



Autumn Sneezeweed

Helenium autumnale

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



Shrubby Cinquefoil

Potentilla fruticosa

Bushy, branched shrub to 3 feet tall with palmately compound leaves (5 to 7 narrow leaflets) and yellow, 5-petaled flowers about an inch across. Wet brush prairies, especially on calcareous soil. Used medicinally by American Indians. Blooms June-August.



Hoary Puccoon, Narrow-leaved Puccoon

Lithospermum canescens,
Lithospermum 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. Pale nutlets sacred to some American Indian tribes, and roots used by some tribes as source for red dye. Bloom in May-June. Dry to mesic prairies.

Golden Alexanders, Heart-leaved Alexanders

Zizia aurea, *Zizia aptera*

Up to 3 feet tall. 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.) Bloom in June. Wet to dry-mesic prairies. Named after German botanist Johann Ziz.



Gumweed

Grindelia squarrosa

Biennial, to 3 feet tall, usually branching. 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. Blooms July-August. Sap used by American Indians to treat various respiratory diseases and rashes.



Riddell's Goldenrod

Solidago riddellii

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



Wood Betony

Pedicularis canadensis

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



Sage

Artemisia spp.

Various species also known as wormwood. Flowers August-September. 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. Often aromatic. American Indian medicinal and ceremonial uses.





Canada Milkvetch

Astragalus canadensis

Plant to about 3 feet tall. Blooms June-July. 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. Fruits small, rounded, bean-like pods. Prairie-woodland margins, low areas, along streams.



Downy Paintbrush

Castilleja sessiliflora

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



Wild Licorice

Glycyrrhiza lepidota

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



White Camas

Zigadenus elegans

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



Western Prairie Fringed Orchid

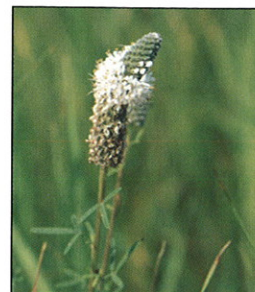
Platanthera praeclara

Northwestern Minnesota's only plant species on the federal Endangered Species list. Stem 1 to 2 feet tall, with narrowly oval lower leaves strongly clasping the stem, smaller upper leaves. 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; moth pollinated. Wet to wet-mesic prairies. Blooms in July.

White Prairie Clover

Dalea candida

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



Small White Lady's Slipper

Cypripedium candidum

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



Culver's Root

Veronicastrum virginicum

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



Wild Plum

Prunus americana

Shrub 3 to 10 feet tall. Fragrant, white flowers in April-May. Edible fruits ripen in August-September. Branches have false thorns. Plums form thickets on the prairie and provide food and shelter for wildlife.



Virginia Mountain Mint

Pycnanthemum virginianum

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

