



Prairie Wildflowers of Prophetstown State Park



The wildflowers described are listed in order of their approximate bloom time, with closely related species occurring together.

These wildflowers represent those species which grow in our full sun prairies. Woodland and wetland flowers also grow at Prophetstown State Park, but are not listed here.

References: Ladd, D and F Oberle. 2005. Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers 2nd edition. The Globe Pequot Press.



Runkel, ST and DM Roosa. 2009. Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie: the Upper Midwest. - 2nd edition. University of Iowa Press.



Ohio Spiderwort

Tradescantia ohiensis

- Flowers mid-spring to mid-summer; 1” wide flowers with 3 rounded petals, 6 bright yellow anthers, and fine spidery violet hairs near base – opens up during the morning and closes by the afternoon sun.
- This 2-3’ plant has long, narrow leaves which are edible along with the stems and flowers.
- Broken leaves reveal a gooey sap, which explains its familiar nickname of “cow slobber.”



Lanceleaf Coreopsis

Coreopsis lanceolata

- Flowers mid-spring to mid-summer; 8-10 petal-like ray flowers are fan-shaped with 4-5 teeth at the tip.
- This 1-2' tall plant has most of its leaves close to the ground (basal); leaves are long (up to 8"), narrow (less than 1") and oppositely arranged on the stem.
- Flowers of most *Coreopsis* species are thought to be a good source of pollen for honey-producing bees.



Wild Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

- Flowers late spring to early fall; each rounded flower head is made up of individual flower tubes with protruding stamens.
- This member of the mint family grows up to 5' tall and has oppositely paired, toothed leaves that rotate 90° along the stem.
- This plant had many medicinal uses for different Native American people. Commonly, the strongly aromatic leaves were used to make a tea to treat colds.



White Wild Indigo

Baptisia leucantha

- Flowers late spring to mid-summer; 1” long flowers are on long stems above the plant; fat, 2” long seed pods start green but turn black as they ripen.
- Growing up to 6’ tall, the stems are smooth; leaves grow alternately on the stem and have 3 leaflets 1-3” long.
- The roots were boiled to treat chronic colds. The plant was also used to treat cuts or wounds that wouldn’t heal.



Butterfly Milkweed

Asclepias tuberosa

- Flowers late spring to summer; the usually orange, but sometimes yellow flowers, arise from the leaf axil in flat clusters of up to 25 flowers.
- This 3' tall plant grows bushy and its narrow, 4" long hairy leaves alternate up the stem, releasing a clear sap when broken, unlike other milkweeds.
- The root was used for food by Native Americans and for treating medical conditions such as coughs and "pleurisy", an inflammation of the lining of the lungs.



Common Milkweed

Asclepias syriaca

- Flowers late spring to summer; the numerous purplish-white flowers occur in rounded clusters at or near the top of the stem.
- Growing 3-4' tall, the 8" long, thick, oval leaves of this plant are as striking as the fat seed pods seen in the fall.
- Native Americans used this versatile plant for many things. The young shoots, flower bud clusters and immature seed pods were all boiled and eaten. The roots were used medicinally and the stem and mature seed pods provided useful fibers.



Hoary Vervain

Verbena stricta

- Flowers late spring to early fall; the 1/4" wide flowers have 5 rounded lobes and occur in tall spikes at the top of the plant, blooming from the bottom first.
- Growing up to 4' tall, this plant of dry prairies has rounded, toothed and hairy leaves up to 4" wide on square stems.
- Some Native Americans roasted and ground the seeds into a flour or meal. A tea was made from the leaves and served as a drink or to treat stomach aches.



Blue Vervain

Verbena hastata

- Flowers summer to fall; the flowers are less than 1/4" wide and occur in tall spikes at the top of the plant, blooming from the bottom first.
- Growing up to 6' tall, this plant of wet prairies has narrow, toothed leaves up to 7" long, often with 2 basal lobes.
- This vervain had many more medicinal uses by Native Americans than other related species. The leaves and roots were used to treat many ailments from colds and fevers to stomach aches and nosebleeds.



Black-eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta

- Flowers mid-spring to fall; yellow ray flowers surround a 1/2-3/4" conical, central disk.
- Growing up to 3' tall, the leaves of this plant are hairy and alternate up the also hairy stem.
- Native Americans used the root or leaves to make a tea for curing colds. A yellow dye was also made from this plant.



Ox-eye Sunflower

Heliopsis helianthoides

- Flowers late spring to fall; 2-4" wide flower heads are on individual stalks.
- This 4' tall plant has triangular-shaped leaves which are coarsely toothed and up to 6" long and 3" wide.
- Not widely used for food or medicine, the root was occasionally used to stimulate the limbs or aid lung problems.



Pale Purple Coneflower

Echinacea pallida

- Flowers late spring to mid-summer; the drooping petal-like ray flowers are up to 3 1/2 " long.
- This plant grows up to 3' tall; the leaves are narrow (up to 10" long) with smooth edges.
- All Echinacea species have medicinal uses; this species was particularly good at treating burns.



Purple Coneflower

Echinacea purpurea

- Flowers late spring to fall; the 2-5" wide flower heads have many petal-like ray flowers that drop slightly.
- Growing 3-5' tall, the alternate, oval-shaped leaves of this plant are rough to the touch and coarsely toothed.
- Widely used to treat infections, wounds and as a general "cure-all"; different parts of the plants were used depending upon the need because the chemicals in the roots are different from the chemicals in the stems, leaves and flowers.



Yellow Coneflower

Ratibida pinnata

- Flowers late spring to fall; the drooping ray flowers surround a bullet-shaped disk of florets that's taller than wide. The disk is gray in color 1st, then turns brown as the florets open.
- This plant grows to 4' tall; the alternate leaves are deeply cut into 3-7 lance-shaped leaflets up to 10" at the base of the plant, getting smaller as they go up the stem.
- The root was used to treat toothaches, and a tea was made from the leaves and flower disks.



Common Evening Primrose

Oenothera biennis

- Flowers late spring to fall; 4 rounded petals (1" long) are above 4 pointed, reflexed sepals; flowers open at dusk to attract moth pollinators and last only 1 day.
- Grows 1-6' tall; the alternate leaves are hairy, narrow (up to 8" long) and get smaller as they go up a usually reddish stem.
- This plant has been used as a poultice and for treating skin diseases. The young shoots were also eaten.



Foxglove Beardtongue

Penstemon digitalis

- Flowers late spring to mid-summer; the 1” long tubular flowers have a 2-lobed upper lip and a 3-lobed lower; beardtongue refers to the tuft of hairs on one of the stamens.
- Grows 2-4’ tall; the 6” long, 2” wide leaves are toothed and alternate along the stem.
- Several species of *Penstemon* plants are used to treat chills, fevers and toothaches.



Wild Quinine

Parthenium integrifolium

- Flowers late spring to summer; almost flat-topped clusters of flowers are at the top of the plant and resemble heads of cauliflower.
- Growing up to 4' tall, this plant has oval-shaped leaves with coarse teeth.
- A tea made from the leaves was used to treat fevers so also called feverfew.



Purple Prairie Clover

Dalea purpurea

- Flowers late spring to summer; the ¼” long flowers are in dense spikes up to 2” tall; blooming from bottom to top, the flowers form a ring as the season progresses.
- This plant grows up to 2’ tall with alternate compound leaves with 3-9 narrow leaflets.
- The leaves, roots and flowers were all used medicinally to treat wounds or as a preventative drink. The stems could also be gathered together to use as a broom.



Royal Catchfly

Silene regia

- Flowers late spring to fall; clustered at the top of the plant, the sticky, tubular flowers have protruding stamens and often ragged tips.
- Growing 2-4' tall, the leaves of this plant are opposite, 5" long and 3" wide.
- Its common name, "catchfly" refers to the stickiness of the flower which can inadvertently trap insects, as its main pollinator is the ruby-throated hummingbird.



New Jersey Tea

Ceanothus americanus

- Flowers late spring to fall; 1” diameter flowers , with 5 folded petals, occur in clusters at top of plant.
- This small shrub grows up to 3’ tall; the alternately arranged, hairy leaves have toothed edges which curve upwards.
- The twisted roots of this plant resembled intestines to Native Americans who used them to treat bowel problems. It was also used as a substitute for tea and to tan hides.



Wild Petunia

Ruellia humilis

- Flowers late spring to early fall; 5 broad purple lobes are fused into a tube 1-2" long; often there are dark purple lines close to the center of each flower.
- Grows 1-2' tall; each pair of opposite leaves are hairy, pointed and up to 2" long.
- No known medical uses; although similar in appearance to the cultivated petunia, they are actually in 2 different plant families.



Rattlesnake Master

Eryngium yuccifolium

- Flowers in the summer; ball-shaped flower heads are in clusters at the top of the plant; each is made up of many smaller flowers.
- Growing up to 4' tall; the strap-like leaves are similar to yucca, but get smaller as they go up the stem.
- The root was used to treat liver problems and also as an expectorant and diuretic.



Culver's Root

Veronicastrum virginicum

- Flowers in the summer; dense clusters of tube-like flowers appear in a candle-like spike. Protruding stamens with yellow-brown tips contrast with the overall white appearance of the flower head.
- Growing up to 5' tall, the narrow leaves of this plant are in whorls of 3-8, up to 6" long with sharply toothed edges.
- The roots contain many chemicals that have been used to induce vomiting and other purging actions.



Compass Plant

Silphium laciniatum

- Flowers late-spring to summer; the alternating flower heads have several petal-like ray flowers surrounded by large green bracts.
- This 3-8' tall plant has very large (~1 ft long), deeply-lobed leaves that get smaller as they alternate up the flowering stalk.
- The lower, more deeply lobed leaves, are usually oriented in a north-south direction to maximize sun exposure for photosynthesis, hence its common English name. Children of many Native American tribes used its resinous sap as a chewing gum.



Rosinweed

Silphium integrifolium

- Flowers summer to fall; several 3” wide flower heads with petal-like ray flowers bloom on short stalks at the top of the plant.
- This 2-6’ tall plant has very rough, usually oppositely paired, stalkless leaves up to 6” long but is extremely variable in leaf structure.
- Some Native Americans used the steam from boiling the root as an analgesic and an infusion of the leaves for bladder troubles.



Prairie Dock

Silphium terebinthinaceum

- Flowers summer to fall; clustered at the top of a 2-10' tall stalk are flower heads with 12-25 petal-like ray flowers with notched tips.
- Easily recognizable early in the growing season by its cluster of large, spade-shaped leaves which can be up to 16" long.
- One of the largest leaved prairie plants, with its tall flowering stalk, it's one of the tallest too. Like its relative the compass plant, it also orients its leaves in a mostly north-south direction to minimize evaporation under the midday sun.



Mountain Mint

Pycnanthemum virginianum

- Flowers mid-summer to early fall; found in dense clusters, each small flower has 3 rounded lobes on the bottom, some with purple spots.
- Growing up to 3' tall, this plant has the square stems typical of most mint plants; the lance-shaped leaves are opposite on the stem and up to 2" long.
- The leaves were used to make tea, but sometimes the roots as well. The Potawatomi used it as a tonic for a "run-down" condition.



Wild Senna

Cassia hebecarpa

- Flowers mid to late summer; the 1” wide flowers occur at the top of the plant and have protruding brownish stamens, the lower ones larger than the top ones.
- This plant grows 3-6’ tall with alternate compound leaves containing 5-10 pairs of leaflets up to 3” long and 1” wide.
- The leaves and seedpods contain chemicals that act as purgatives or laxatives to mammals ,so they will avoid eating this plant while the seeds are enjoyed by some game birds such as the Northern bobwhite.



Showy Tick Trefoil

Desmodium canadense

- Flowers mid to late summer; each 1/2 “ long flower occurs as part of a taller cluster.
- Grows 2-4’ tall; the compound, alternate leaves are typical of the bean family with 3 leaflets.
- The flattened seed pods have 3-5 segments ,which are covered in tiny hairs that “stick-tight” to fur, clothing and shoelaces as a way to distribute the seeds.



Common Ironweed

Vernonia fasciculata

- Flowers mid-summer to fall; less than 1” wide, the flower heads with radiating purple disk flowers give each cluster a “fuzzy” appearance.
- This plant grows 4-6’ tall and it’s lance-shaped leaves are toothed, alternating up the sometimes reddish stems.
- Named for its fibrous and tough stems, this plant has not been used for medicine or food.



Dense Blazingstar

Liatris spicata

- Flowers late-summer to fall; stalk crowded and overlapping with flower heads. Inside of flower tube soft-hairy.
- This plant grows 2-4' tall and it's grass-like leaves are clumped toward the base of the plant, but extend up the stem to the showy flower cluster.
- The protruding style of the crowded flower head gives an overall feathery appearance, hence its alternate name of Gayfeather.



Stiff Goldenrod

Solidago rigida

- Flowers late summer to fall; the 1/3 “ long flowers are in a rounded to flat-topped cluster at the top of the plant. 7-14 petal-like ray flowers surround a central disk.
- Growing up to 5’ tall, the alternate leaves are broadly oval, thick and leathery.
- A lotion made from the flowers was used to treat bee stings.



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Thanks...

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