Shortgrass Prairie Region

The shortgrass prairie region includes the southwestern corner and Panhandle of Nebraska. This area is made up of short to mixed grass prairie and the Pine Ridge. The shortgrass prairie is the driest and warmest of the Great Plains grasslands.

This region receives an average of 12 - 17 inches of rainfall annually and consists of buffalo grass and blue grama. The Pine Ridge is found in northwestern Nebraska and is dominated by ponderosa pine. More than 300 species of migratory and resident birds can be found in the shortgrass prairie region, as well as a variety of mammals, plants, reptiles, insects and other species.

Plant Viewing Tips

1. Go to where the habitat is — visit state parks and other public spaces.
2. Do your homework — learn what species grow in the area.
3. Think about timing — check what is blooming in the area this time of year.
4. Consult an expert — join in on a guided plant hike to learn where to find the best blooms.
5. Leave no trace — leave wildlife in nature and nature the way you found it.

Terms to Know

Annual Plant — One year lifecycle
Biennial Plant — Two-year lifecycle
Perennial Plant — More than two year lifecycle
Alternating Leaves
One leaf attached per node
Opposite Leaves
A pair of leaves attached per node
Whorled Leaves
Several leaves attached per node

Buffalo Grass
*Bouteloua dactyloides*
- Height: 3 - 10 in.
- Description: Perennial, low-growing grass with flag-like, one-sided seed stalks.
- Habitat: Dry grasslands
- Blooms: May - July
- Viewing: Statewide, especially in west

Threadleaf Sedge
*Carex filifolia*
- Height: 4 - 20 in.
- Description: Perennial grass with reddish sheath, flowers located on 1 in. spike on top of stem.
- Habitat: Well-drained grasslands
- Blooms: April - June
- Viewing: West to central

Ponderosa Pine
*Pinus ponderosa*
- Height: 60 - 100 ft.
- Description: Long-lived pine tree with 3 - 5 in. needles that grow in clusters of 3, devoid of lower branches, produces large cones.
- Habitat: Rocky, well-drained forests
- Blooms: April - June, biannually
- Viewing: Panhandle, Pine Ridge

Rocky Mountain Juniper
*Juniperus scopulorum*
- Height: 12 - 36 ft.
- Description: Long-lived evergreen, often with irregular crown, produces white-blue berries.
- Habitat: Rocky, well-drained outcrops at elevations to 7,500 ft.
- Blooms: April - May
- Viewing: Panhandle, Pine Ridge

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**Yucca**
Yucca glauca
Height (Leaf): 16 - 30 in.
Description: Perennial with rosette of stiff, sharp leaves. Flowers grow from central stalk that can reach 5 ft. high.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: Late May - mid July
Viewing: Statewide

**Wild Alfalfa**
*Psoralea tenuiflora*
Height: 12 - 36 in.
Description: Perennial, gray hairs on stem and alternating leaves, flower stalks with purple pea-like blooms.
Habitat: Dry uplands
Blooms: May - July
Viewing: Statewide except northeast

**Plains Prickly Pear**
*Opuntia polyacantha*
Height: 8+ in.
Description: Cactus with stems in round jointed pads or segments, covered in clusters of spines, yellow flowers with overlapping petals.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: June - July
Viewing: Panhandle

**Dotted Gayfeather**
*Liatris punctata*
Height: 12 - 30 in.
Description: Perennial with tall stems, usually growing in a cluster, numerous alternating leaves, and pink/purple flowers along top third of stem.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: August - October
Viewing: Statewide

**Showy Milkweed**
*Asclepias speciosa*
Height: 18 - 36 in.
Description: Perennial with non-branching stem, leaves 3 - 7 in. long positioned opposite each other along stem, clusters of small pink-white-colored flowers on top.
Habitat: Moist, sandy soil
Blooms: Mid June - late August
Viewing: West to central

**Missouri Goldenrod**
*Solidago missouriensis*
Height: 12 - 36 in.
Description: Perennial with a smooth, tall stem with alternating leaves and small yellow flowers along top branches.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: July - September
Viewing: Statewide

**Woolly Vigilant**
*Bouteloua gracilis*
Height: 12 - 24 in.
Description: Perennial with tall stem and stiff hairs and alternating leaves, yellow to red flower with gray head that turns brown as it matures.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: July - September
Viewing: Statewide

**Nuttall’s Violet**
*Viola nuttallii*
Height: 1 - 3 in.
Description: Short perennial with 1 - 3 in. leaves and yellow flowers with five petals and three red-brown lower nectar lines.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: April - September
Viewing: West, excluding Sandhills

**Broom Snakeweed**
* Gutierrezia sarothrae*
Height: 12 - 36 in.
Description: Perennial that is bushy and shrub-like with numerous branches, alternating leaves, and clusters of small yellow flowers at the end of branches.
Habitat: Dry prairie, rocky outcrops
Blooms: Mid July - September
Viewing: West to central

**Plains Sunflower**
*Helianthus petiolaris*
Height: 20 - 60 in.
Description: Annual sunflower with a daisy-like flower that are about 3 in. across and have red-brown centers, tall hairy stems alternating leaves.
Habitat: Dry soil
Blooms: Late June - September
Viewing: Statewide

**Needle and Thread Grass**
* Hesperostipa comata*
Height: 12 - 24 in.
Description: Perennial tufted bunch grass with 4 - 5 in. awns that when it detaches with the pointed seed it resembles a needle and thread.
Habitat: Well-drained grasslands
Blooms: June
Viewing: West to central

**White Prairie-clover**
* Dalea candida*
Height: 8 - 12 in.
Description: Perennial with tall stem and alternating leaves, 1 - 2 in. flower head with circles of small white blooms that advance from bottom to top.
Habitat: Dry prairie
Blooms: May - September
Viewing: Statewide

**Blue Grama**
*Bouteloua gracilis*
Height: 10 - 20 in.
Description: Perennial, densely tufted bunchgrass, seed head sits at top of stem and when mature it is curved, resembling an eyebrow.
Habitat: Well-drained grasslands
Blooms: June - August
Viewing: Statewide