Mixedgrass Prairie Region

The mixedgrass prairie region is a transitional zone between the tallgrass prairie of the east and the shortgrass prairie of the west. As a result, the vegetation of this area varies, with a combination of tallgrass and shortgrass prairie plants. There are many wetlands, rivers, and streams. Wooded zones surround almost every waterway. Precipitation is greater in the east, with about 28 inches annually, compared with 20 inches in the west.

The land is primarily used for agriculture, with around two-thirds converted to cropland and much of the remaining third used for grazing livestock. This is however, a diversity of wildlife found in this region, including the annual spring staging of 500,000 sandhill cranes around the Platte River in central Nebraska. This spectacle draws around 80,000 nature enthusiasts each year, with about half from outside of Nebraska.

Cottonwood
Populus deltoides
Height: 50 - 80+ ft.
Description: Perennial deciduous tree with broad brown, dark-green glossy leaves with toothed edges, ridged dark-gray bark, seeds with fluffy hairs for a cotton-like appearance.
Habitat: Open canopy areas, tolerant of both dry and wet soils.
Blooms: April - June
Viewing: Statewide, especially in east.

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Eastern Red Cedar
Juniperus virginiana
Height: 30 - 40+ ft.
Description: Perennial evergreen juniper tree, fragrant sharp to scaly green foliage, red/brown peeling bark, and gray/blue fruit.
Habitat: Riparian, grasslands, and disturbed areas - often considered invasive.
Blooms: March - May
Viewing: Statewide

Burr Oak
Quercus macrocarpa
Height: 30 - 70+ ft.
Description: Perennial hardwood tree fiddle-like lobed leaves. Acorns with deep, fringed cup. Burr oaks can grow into tall, branched tree, or into shrubbier form found on bluffs or hillsides.
Habitat: Rocky, well-drained outcrops at elevations to 7,500 ft.
Blooms: March - May
Viewing: Eastern half

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

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.
Green Milkweed  
Asclepias viridensis  
Height (Leaf): 10 - 24 in.  
Description: Perennial with deep green, opposite leaves with wavy edges. Small greenish-white flowers grouped in spherical clusters along stalk.  
Habitat: Dry prairie  
Blooms: May - July  
Viewing: Statewide  

Upright Prairie Coneflower  
Ratibida columnifera  
Height: 12 - 24 in.  
Description: Perennial with tall stem with 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  

White Prairie-clover  
Dalea candida  
Height: 12 - 24 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  

Purple Locoweed  
Oxytropis lambertii  
Height: 4 - 16 in.  
Description: Perennial, foliage often forming tufts or mats stems not evident, flowering stalks and leaves hairy, 10 - 20 purple pea-like flowers atop a leafless stalk.  
Habitat: Dry soil, often eroded area  
Blooms: May - June  
Viewing: Statewide, except SE  

Nine-anther Prairie Clover  
Dalea enneandra  
Height: 12 - 80 in.  
Description: Perennial with branched stems, alternating leaves, and flower spike with small white flowers.  
Habitat: Dry prairie  
Blooms: June - September  
Viewing: Statewide  

Narrow-leaved Coneflower  
Echinacea angustifolia  
Height: 16 - 32 in.  
Description: Perennial, hairy stems, dark green leaves, a large solitary flower head, pink to red-violet with a brown spiny center.  
Habitat: Moist to dry prairie  
Blooms: June - July  
Viewing: Statewide, though less common west  

Pink Smartweed  
Polygonum bicornem  
Height: 8 - 72 in.  
Description: Annual with alternating leaves on a thin, branched stem. Crowded flower spike with small pink blooms.  
Habitat: Shallow wetlands  
Blooms: May - July  
Viewing: Central - east, most abundant central  

Wild Alfalfa  
Psaurea densiflora  
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  

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  

Lead Plant  
Amorpha canescens  
Height: 12 - 36 in.  
Description: Perennial shrub with woody stem, alternating leaflets, and stalk of red-purple flowers.  
Habitat: Well-drained soil  
Blooms: June - July  
Viewing: Statewide  

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Side Oats Grama  
Bouteloua curtipendula  
Height: 8 - 10 in.  
Description: Perennial with oat-like seed spikes that hang down one side of the flowering stem. Leaves are narrow blue-gray and foliage becoming brown-orange in winter.  
Habitat: Dry prairie  
Blooms: June - August  
Viewing: Statewide  

Sandbar Willow  
Salix exigua  
Height: 24 - 36 ft.  
Description: Perennial shrub with thin stems and narrow serrated leaves. Grows in thickets, has tan blooms. Stems reddish when young, gray when mature.  
Habitat: Riparian areas with moisture, sandy soil  
Blooms: March - April  
Viewing: Statewide