

## Typical Tallgrass Prairie Flowers

Aster, New England,  
*Aster novae-angline*  
Aster, Smoothed Blue,  
*Aster laevis*  
Beardstongue, Large Flowering,  
*Penstemon grandiflora*  
Blazing Star, Prairie,  
*Liatrus pycnostachya*  
Butterfly Milkweed,  
*Asclepias tuberosa*  
Catchfly, Royal,  
*Silene regia*  
Clover, Purple Prairie,  
*Petalostemon purpureum*  
Coneflower, Purple,  
*Echinacea purpurea*  
Coneflower, Gray-headed,  
*Ratibida pinnata*  
Coreopsis, Prairie,  
*Coreopsis palmata*  
Fire Pink,  
*Silene virginica*  
Golden Alexander,  
*Zizia aptera*  
Goldenrod, Showy  
*Solidago speciosa*  
Indigo, Blue False,  
*Baptisia australis*  
Leadplant,  
*Amorpha canescens*  
Shooting Star,  
*Dodecatheon media*  
Spiderwort,  
*Tradescantia ohiensis*  
Yarrow,  
*Achillea millefolium*

## Several Prairie Grasses

Big Bluestem,  
*Andropogon gerardii*  
Bottlebrush Grass,  
*Elymus hystrix*  
Cordgrass, Prairie,  
*Spartina pectinata*  
Indian Grass,  
*Sorghastrum nutans*  
Little Bluestem,  
*Schizachyrium scoparium*  
Prairie Dropseed,  
*Sporobolus heterolepis*  
Sideoats Grama,  
*Bouteloua curtipendula*

## What is the most important economic value that remains from these original prairies?

Our greatest heritage is the rich soils, accumulated over thousands of years. Some of these soils were 20' deep. They continue to produce corn, soybeans, and other crops for American agriculture.

*This brochure was prepared by members of the Great Rivers Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society with help from the Two Rivers NWR staff.*

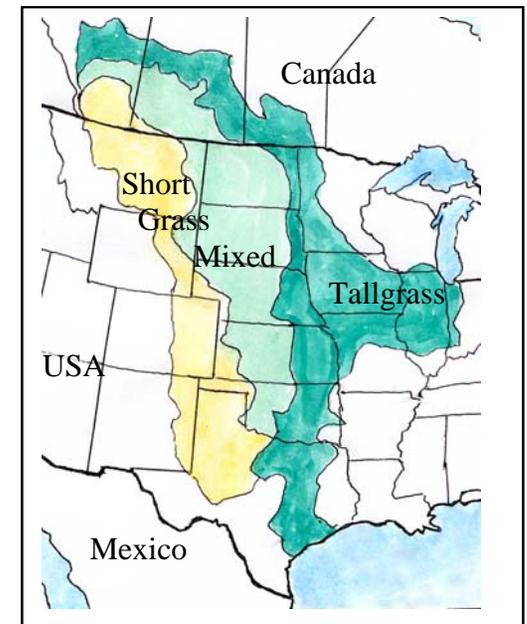
For information, call the Refuge  
At 618/883-2524

## What is a Prairie?

**Prairies** are large grasslands or natural meadows. They contain many different flowers and herbs but few trees. The grasses range widely in height depending on, variety, soil types and rainfall.

The waving tops of prairie grasses reminded early pioneers of ocean waves. Horses and cattle could be lost from view in these tall meadows.

## Three Types of Original Prairie In Central North America



## Can you describe the different prairie?

Yes. Three main types are *tallgrass*, *shortgrass*, and *mixed* prairie. Each has its own dominant grasses and other plants but there is much overlapping. The differences are due to rainfall amounts, temperature range, and drainage. Special areas within these broad types are called: *wetland*, *mesic* (I.e., moderate) and *dryland* prairies. *Hilltop* and *sand* prairies are special types of dry land prairie.

Tallgrass prairie, sometimes called “True prairie”, has a layered look made up of tall grasses, medium-sized flowers, and short plants. Illinois, the “Prairie State”, had over 300 different prairie plants statewide. Seasonal differences in bloom and color add to its year-around beauty.

## What conditions favored prairie increase?

Ending of the Ice Age brought temperate climates to central North America. The Rocky Mountain range in western states reduced rainfall to the east. These moderate, dry conditions, plus fine glacial soils, helped grasslands replace former woodlands.

Grazing animals like bison and elk favored some grasses over others. This changed the types of plants that survived. Burning, whether by lightning or by native Americans (to improve hunting, travel, or community defense) also helped grasslands compete with forests.

## Where were the great prairies located?

The great North American prairies ranged from central Canada down to central Texas and from the western Rocky Mountains east to Indiana.

Tallgrass prairies occurred in the eastern part of this range. Shortgrass prairies occurred on the drier, western side while mixed prairies, in the middle, had features of both tall and shortgrass prairies.

## Do any prairies remain today?

The tallgrass prairies are almost all converted to corn and soybean fields and to urban housing areas. What remains is less than 1% of the former acreage. In Illinois, a few of these original prairies range up to 2900 acres. But most are tiny parcels along railroad right of ways and cemeteries.

About half of the shortgrass prairies remain. This saving is due partly to ranchers adapting cattle raising to shortgrass conditions. The dry western lands are also less suitable to plowing for grain crops.

## Where Can I See Pictures of Prairie Grasses or Flowers?

Two books filled with prairie plant pictures are:  
Kurz, Don Illinois Wildflowers, Cloudland Net. Publishing, 2004.  
Ladd, Doug and Oberle, Frank Tallgrass

Prairie Wildflowers, The Nature Conservancy, 1995.

## Where Can I Read About Prairies?

Recommended books:

Costello, David F., The Prairie World, Thomas Crowell, 1969.  
Jones, Stephen R. & Cushman, Ruth Carol, The North American Prairie, Houghton Mifflin, 2004.. (Peterson Field Guide)  
Madson, John, Tallgrass Prairie, Falcon Press, 1993. (Has pictures, too!)

## Where Can I Find Good Examples of Illinois Prairies Today?

Ayers Sand Prairie, 109 acres near Savannah.  
Fults Hill Prairie, 532 acres, Red Bud.  
Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area, 2900 acres near Joliet.  
Heartland Prairie, Gordon Moore Park, 27 acres near Alton.  
Illinois Beach State Park, 829 acres, Zion  
Indian Boundary Prairies, 252 acres, south side of Chicago area.  
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, 19000 restored acres, Wilmington.  
Nachusa Grasslands, 1500 acres near Dixon.  
Revis Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, 400 acres, in Sangchris Lake State Park on Sangamon River near Springfield.