

■ Native Range Plants

Native range plants include species that are a part of the original flora of the area in question. Listed on the following pages are common native range plants found in North Dakota and eastern Minnesota with a short description, season of growth, site found on, forage value, and their response to grazing.

Big bluestem

A warm-season, perennial, tall-stature, sod-forming grass found on moist soils and ecological sites. Potentially abundant on overflow and subirrigated ecological sites. This grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently being replaced by less productive mid and short grass species. Big bluestem is very palatable and nutritious to all classes of livestock when actively growing but becomes coarse late in the season and quality declines.



Blue grama

A warm-season, perennial, short-stature bunch-grass found on drier upland sites including sandy, gravelly, silty, clayey, and claypan soils. This grass increases with overgrazing, frequently replacing more productive mid and tall grass species, often forming a dense sod intermixed with sedges. Blue grama is low producing, very palatable and nutritious to all classes of livestock, even during the winter.



Foxtail barley

A cool-season, perennial, mid-stature bunch-grass found on moist saline sites, often forming a distinctive ring around wetlands. This grass increases with overgrazing, frequently replacing productive mid and tall grasses, and wetland sedges. Due to increase levels of salts caused by a reduction of the more desirable plants species, foxtail barley will increase and dominate these sites. Once this occurs, it becomes difficult to return these sites to their original status. Foxtail barley provides fair forage for cattle, horses, and sheep when young but becomes unpalatable when mature.



Green needlegrass

A cool-season, perennial, mid-stature bunch-grass found on medium and fine textured soils. This species grows best on sandy to loamy soils but is also found on heavy clay soils. This grass decreases with overgrazing and early season grazing, frequently being replaced by less productive mid and short grass species. Green needlegrass is regarded as the most palatable of the needlegrasses and is nutritious to all classes of livestock.



Little bluestem

A warm-season, perennial, mid-stature bunch-grass found dry ridges, hillsides, and sand hill areas; often associated with calcareous soils. The grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently being replaced by short grass, such as bluegrama, sedges, and broad leaf species. The young shoots or new leaf tissue of little bluestem is regarded as palatable and often selected by grazing livestock. Older plant leaf tissue and seed stocks are avoided, giving the impression that the plant is not being grazed. Mature little bluestem becomes wolfy and has a classic red tinge color in late summer.



Needle-and-thread

A cool-season, perennial, mid-stature bunch-grass found on sandy and coarse textured soils. This grass initially increases with grazing pressure, eventually decreasing with overgrazing, replaced by less productive mid and short grass species. Needle-and-thread is regarded as very palatable by all classes of livestock when grazed before plant maturity. If grazing occurs when seed or “needles” are present, they may be mechanically injurious, especially to sheep.



Prairie cordgrass

A warm-season, perennial, tall-stature, sod-forming grass found on moist soils and ecological sites. Potentially abundant on moist areas such as wet prairie, including the wet meadow ecological sites. This grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently being replaced by spike rush, undesirable wetland sedges, and lower producing mid grasses. Prairie cordgrass is not readily eaten by livestock except in the spring or in the fall after a killing frost.



Prairie sandreed

A warm-season, perennial, tall-stature, sod-forming grass found on sand, sandy, and coarse textured soils. Often associated with drier upland sites, forming dense patches or colonies. This grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently being replaced by lower producing mid and short grasses. Prairie sandreed provides fair to good forage value for bison, cattle and horses and fair for sheep during its first two months of growth and after it cures on the stem for fall and winter grazing.



Reed canarygrass

A cool-season, strongly rhizomatous perennial that is tall-stature. It is most commonly found on wet meadow ecological sites. This grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently being replaced by less productive mid and short grass species. Reed canarygrass is palatable and provides good forage for all classes of livestock.



Sideoats grama

A warm-season, perennial, mid-stature sod-forming grass found on fine textured soils and weakly developed soils of steeper slopes, often associated with calcareous soils. May also occur on subirrigated and overflow ecological sites in excellent condition. This grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently replaced by short grass species. Sideoats grama is very palatable and nutritious to all classes of livestock throughout much of the summer and fall.



Switchgrass

A warm-season, perennial, tall-stature sod-forming grass found on moist lowland prairies, including overflow and subirrigated ecological sites. This grass decreases with overgrazing, frequently being replaced by lower producing mid and short grasses, particularly Kentucky bluegrass. Switchgrass provides good forage for bison and cattle when in the vegetative growth stage. As the plant matures in mid summer, nutrient quality and palatability decline dramatically.



Western wheatgrass

A cool-season, perennial, mid-stature, sod-forming grass found on a wide variety of soils and sites, often associated with loamy and clayey ecologically sites. It also possesses a high tolerance to saline and alkaline soils. This grass decreases when exposed to long-term over-use but may increase with short-term overuse.

Western wheatgrass is regarded as very palatable, nutritious, and digestible to all classes of livestock. Western wheatgrass is North Dakota's state grass.



Upland sedges (needleleaf, threadleaf, sun sedge)

Cool-season, perennial, short-stature, grass-like plants found on dry prairies, rocky hilltops, and sandy to fine-textured soils. These grass-like plants increase with overgrazing, replacing many mid grasses. Upland sedges are good forage for all classes of livestock in early spring, becoming less palatable once mature.



Forbs

Broad-leaf herbaceous plants other than those in the grass, grass-like, or shrub families. Forbs provide the greatest diversity of plant species on the prairie, occurring on a wide range of soils and ecological sites. Some forbs, such as fringed sagewort, green sagewort, and curly-cup gumweed, increase with overgrazing; most native legumes such as purple prairie clover decrease with poor grazing management.



Shrubs

A plant that has persistent woody stems and relatively low growth habit. Common shrubs would include western snowberry (buckbrush), lead plant, prairie rose, sage brush, and some willow species. Most shrubs tend to increase with lack of grazing and fire.

