

Spring to Summer Species Timeline:

Earlier



Buffalo Currant
Ribes odoratum
Sometimes called “Clove currant” for the strong smell; makes small 1/2” berries useful for jellies and valuable to wildlife. This shrubs leaves turn scarlet in autumn.



Mead's Sedge
Carex meadii Dewey
Blooms early April and May; low-growing sedge found most on upland areas with limestone soils. To distinguish sedge from grass, remember “sedges have edges.”



Fringed Puccoon
Lithospermum incisum
Native Americans used this plant to treat coughs, colds, delirium, and paralysis, and obtained a bluish-violet dye from the roots. Blooms April & May.



American Kestrel
Falco sparverius
The only kestrel in the Americas, this small falcon primarily preys on grasshoppers, lizards, mice, and smaller birds. Look for them on fence-lines.



Prairie Spiderwort
Tradescantia occidentalis
One of several spiderworts found on the Plains. Wort comes from Anglo-Saxon *wyrt*, meaning “herb” or “root”, and spider from the belief held at one time that they would cure spider bites.



Chokecherry
Prunus virginiana
This shrub is found throughout North America. Highly scented blooms in early May yield fruit that is astringent and best used in jellies and jams.



Prairie Ragwort
Packera plattensis
Found on dry, rocky hillsides and slopes, prairie ragwort can be toxic to cattle, but rarely is found in concentration.



Common Milkweed
Asclepias syriaca L.
Begins to bud in late May. Common milkweed is a crucial host plant for Monarch caterpillars. Young shoots were sometimes eaten by Great Plains tribes.



Western Meadowlark
Sturnella neglecta
This medium-sized lark nests on the ground and eats insects and seeds. It's distinctive call is what Cather wrote about in *O Pioneers!*.



Purple Locoweed
Oxytropis lambertii Pursh
Found on upland or rocky prairie soil, purple locoweed can be toxic to livestock, but generally is only eaten when other forage is unavailable.



Platte River Milk Vetch
Astragalus plattensis Nutt
Sweet-scented and very palatable to livestock. Found on rocky prairies and hillsides. Also sometimes known as the ground plum. One of several vetches here.



Scarlet Gaura
Gaura coccinea Pursh
Colony forming. The Lakota rubbed this plant on their hands to make them sticky to aid in catching horses, and the Navajo used a cold tea made from scarlet gaura to settle upset stomachs.



Prairie Rose
Rosa arkansana
Rose hips contain vitamin C and can be eaten raw, stewed, candied, or made into jelly. Plains Indian tribes used the hips as an emergency food source. Taproots can go more than 20 feet deep.



Bobolink
Dolichonyx oryzivorus
This New World Blackbird eats seeds and insects. Bright breeding plumage replaced by more camouflaged feathers in summer. Listen for its distinctive bubbling call. A flock of bobolinks is called a chain.



White Milkwort
Polygala alba Nutt.
Milkwort comes from the belief that this plant would increase lactation for mothers. Native American tribes used it to treat earache.



Purple Poppy Mallow
Callirhoe involucrata
The Lakota and Dakota burned the dried roots and inhaled the smoke as a treatment for colds. The roots were also boiled and used for a tea to treat intestinal pains. Deep taproot makes it drought-resistant.



Serrate-Leaf Evening Primrose
Calylophus serrulatus Nutt.
Drought resistant. In addition to an extensive root system, the leaves fold in the midday sun, reducing water loss through their surfaces.



Prairie Irid
Nemastylis geminiflora Nutt.
Each flower lasts only a day. The flowers usually open in the morning and close before sunset. The perianth segments curl by mid-afternoon.



Yellow Sweet Clover
Melilotus officinalis L.
One of the first plants to appear on disturbed sites. Excellent plant for honey production. May be more abundant in some years than in others. The leaves have a vanilla-like odor when crushed.



Purple Prairie Clover
Dalea purpurea
1/2 to 2-1/2 inch spiked or cone-shaped flower heads are common on rocky or dry prairies in mid-summer. Nutritious for grazing and native with sweet tasting root.



Regal Fritillary
Speyeria idalia
The regal fritillary is a prairie specialist, at risk due to a shrinking habitat and pesticide use. Caterpillars feed only on violets, but butterflies feed on a variety of prairie flowers.



Virginia Groundcherry
Physalis virginiana
3/4” pale yellow flowers yield husks resembling Japanese lanterns. The green fruit inside is poisonous, though the ripe fruit was eaten by Plains tribes and early settlers.



Narrow-Leaf Bluet
Hedyotis nigricans
Deeply tap-rooted and long-blooming, narrow-leaf bluets form dense clusters of 1/4 - 1/2 inch wide flowers, ranging from white to pink to pale blue.



Butterfly Milkweed
Asclepias tuberosa
Sometimes known as Pleurisy Root for its use in treating respiratory complaints, this milkweed is important for butterflies and insects. Deeply taprooted, but easily grown from seed for the garden.



White Sage
Artemisia ludoviciana
Spreads by seed and rhizome, often forming colonies. Many medicinal and ceremonial Native American uses. Very aromatic.



Foxglove Beardtongue
Penstemon digitalis Nutt. ex Sims
Named after its resemblance to foxglove, this plant is actually a member of the plantain family. May be white to purple-streaked. A favorite of bumblebees.



Western Marbleseed
Onosmodium bejariense
Heavily veined, hairy leaves are unique, as are the flowers of this plant, also known as false gromwell. Produces small, hard nutlets.



Catclaw Sensitive Briar
Mimosa quadrivalvis L. var. *nuttallii*
Brilliant pink stamens form an orb 3/4 to 1 inch across when blooming. Leaves are sensitive to touch, folding up when disturbed. Prickly seed pods develop late summer.



Narrow Leaf Four O'Clock
Mirabilis linearis
Called four o'clocks for their late afternoon blooming habit, this erect, slender plant was used as medicine by native people, and its egg-shaped fruit as food.



Wavy-Leafed Thistle
Cirsium undulatum
Silvery-green, heavily waved spiny leaves form rosettes in early spring. Though livestock avoid these, birds eat the seeds. This native thistle seldom needs control, but it can indicate overgrazing.



Lead Plant
Amorpha canescens Pursh
Bushy shrub; an important prairie legume (nitrogen fixer). Roots as deep as 16 feet. “Lead plant” is from the silvery-gray hairs that give the leaves a lead color.



Western Ironweed
Vernonia baldwinii
This bitter plant is common in grazed prairie land, as cattle will not eat it. Plant is 2-3' tall with clusters of purplish-brown flowers, often blooming at once.



Western Snowberry
Symphoricarpos occidentalis
Also known as buckbrush, wolf-berry, or coralberry. Small shrub spreads by seeds and rhizomes and, without fire suppression, can be invasive. The small fruits produced are eaten by birds and rodents.



Slim Flower Scurf Pea
Psoralidium tenuiflorum
A stiffly open-branched prairie forb with small early-fall blooming purple flowers. 1/4 - 1/2 inch pods form following blooming period. May have antibacterial properties.



Prairie Coneflower
Ratibida columnifera
10” tall single flowers have drooping petals with notched ends. Great Plains tribes used the leaves and stems to treat poison ivy, rattlesnake bites, headaches, and stomachaches.



Black Sampson Echinacea
Echinacea angustifolia
Pink to pale purple flowers contain pain-reducing compounds and were used by Native Americans to treat wounds and burns. Taproot can grow to 5-8 feet, allowing the plant to survive periods of drought.



Snow on the Mountain
Euphorbia marginata
Related to poinsettia, snow-on-the-mountain exudes a milky sap if broken that can cause a rash and gives the plant a bitter taste.



Whorled Milkweed
Asclepias verticillata
Blooming around the same time as other milkweeds, this species is notable for its narrow, long leaves. Colony-forming. Native tribes used this to treat snake-bite.



Canada Wild Rye
Elymus canadensis
Cool-season perennial grass grows 2-4 ft. tall. Spike-shaped heads of oat-like seeds with long, whiskery awns, which cause the stems to bend and droop in early fall.

Later

Late Summer to Autumn Timeline:

Earlier



Hoary Vervain
Verbena stricta
Very drought resistant with tap roots reaching down over 10 feet, hoary vervain is bitter and often goes ungrazed. However, it forms small seeds that are utilized by prairie chickens and other birds.



Common Sunflower
Helianthus annuus
Nearly all parts of this common prairie plant can be used for food, dyes, or oils. One of the earliest cultivated plants, and one of the only ones to originate on the Great Plains.



Clammyweed
Polanisia dodecandra
Called clammyweed because of its sticky hairs covering the plant. A strong, unpleasant peppery odor, and upright 2-3" long seed pods.



Viscid Euthamia
Euthamia gymnospermoides
Also known as flat-top goldenrod or narrow leaf goldenrod. This is one of several varieties of goldenrod that grace the prairie in the fall.



Maximilian Sunflower
Helianthus maximiliani
Named for Prince Maximilian Alexander Philip von Wied-Neuwied, (1782-1867), the German botanist who discovered it in North America. Maximilians produce abundant seed for wildlife on the prairies.



Dog Day Cicada
Tibicen pruinosa
If you don't see them, you'll definitely hear the cicada, but only the males! They emerge during the "dog days" of summer from underground, where they feed on roots of plants.



Dotted Gayfeather
Liatris punctata
Also known as liatris; grows in clumps. Flower spikes can reach several feet in height, though on our prairie most are much shorter. Brilliant purple blooms last several weeks.



Blue Pitcher Sage
Salvia azurea
A common—but beautiful—prairie perennial, and an important late-season species for pollinators.



Ten-Petal Mentzelia
Mentzelia decapetala
Striking white flowers, sometimes in excess of 6" across, open in late afternoon and are very attractive to pollinators. A very deep taproot makes these drought resistant and also difficult to move.



Little Bluestem
Schizachyrium scoparium
Beautiful blue-green bunch grass in summer, changing to wine-colored stems with fluffy seeds in September. A warm-season, short grass standby.



Blue Grama
Bouteloua gracilis
An important short-grass prairie species, this 6"-12" tall warm-season grass is drought-, grazing-, and cold-tolerant. The inflorescence, when dried, curls to look like false eyelashes.



Indian Grass
Sorghastrum nutans
Indian grass is another tall bunching grass, ranging from 4-7 feet tall. Known for its gold and dark wine colors in the fall.



Big Bluestem
Andropogon gerardii Vitman
Warm season, perennial bunch grass ranging from 4 - 8 feet tall. Also known as "turkey-foot" for its 3-branched inflorescence.



Smooth Sumac
Rhus glabra
This colony-forming native shrub can be invasive and is controlled by fire. Can reach 10 -20 feet in height. Forms red berries and leaves in the fall.



Fremont's Clematis
Clematis fremontii S. Wats.
Also known as Leather Plant for its thick leaves, in fall the blue bell-shaped flowers yield these unique 1" seed heads. A species unique to this specific area.

Later

"That shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion that I have never been able to shake. It has been the happiness and curse of my life." ~ Willa Cather

In August, 1974, The Nature Conservancy purchased, with the help of the Woods Charitable Fund, roughly 612 acres of native prairie in southern Webster County. In 1975, the prairie was dedicated as the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. Over-grazing and the use of herbicides had reduced the biological diversity of not just the Cather Prairie, but nearly all of the Great Plains grassland areas.

The Willa Cather Foundation acquired the area in 2006 with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy. With grant funds from The Nebraska Environmental Trust, we have removed thousands of non-native and invasive trees that inhibit the growth of desirable native species such as purple prairie clover, big bluestem, showy milkweed, echinacea and baptisia. The Willa Cather Foundation continues to dedicate significant time and effort to restoring the Prairie to its pre-1900s condition.

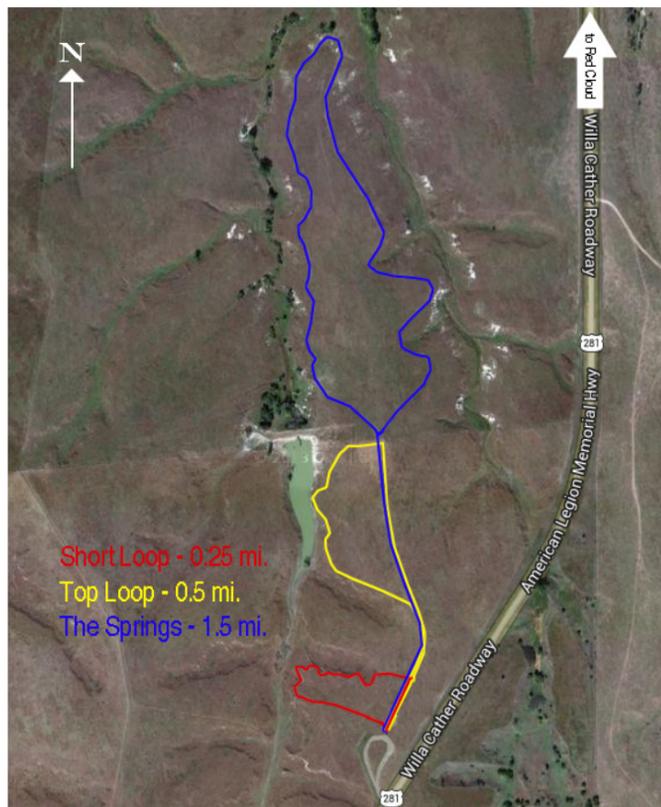
Responsible grazing practices and the inclusion of fire in our management rotation has also allowed us to control invasive shrubs, to promote warm season native grasses, and to re-establish natural springs that provide crucial habitat for grassland birds, amphibians, and small mammals.

The preservation of the Cather Prairie is part of a holistic approach to the study of American art, history, and culture through the works of Willa Cather, who championed the prairie and its "fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness." We aim to be a part of this land's struggle back to itself.

This brochure was funded in part by a grant from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie is located 5 miles south of Red Cloud, Nebraska, on the west side of Hwy. 281. Hike the trails, enjoy the unbroken horizon, experience the Nebraska prairie as it was more than one hundred years ago



Willa Cather Memorial Prairie



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