

# BWSR FEATURED PLANT

## PRAIRIE SMOKE *Geum triflorum*

Family: Rose

Midwest Region Wetland  
Indicator Status: FACU



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A cool season forb that brings delicate and vibrant color, prairie smoke exhibits three showy reddish to pink flowers early in the season standing out amongst previous year's brown dead growth and cool season grass shoots. One of the earliest blooming prairie plants and signaling the start of the blooming season in Minnesota, the forb brings early satisfaction to any natural or garden setting. Following the blooming period, the long plumed seedpods give the plant the appearance of puffs of smoke, which have given the plant its common name. Providing early season interest and growing in a variety of dry conditions within Minnesota the species is used in a wide variety of plantings from urban raingardens to dry prairie restorations.



Flowers grow in groups of three from leafless stems photo by Sam Shaw

## Identification

Fairly easily identified, this perennial forb prospers in native short grass prairies and a variety of garden settings though is not limited to these specific environments. The plant displays fern-like gray-green foliage with basal leaves. The leaves and stem of the flower are covered in dense hairs that are soft to the touch and aid in their identification. The reddish-pink flowers bloom in May and early June at the top of a 6-16" stem in a grouping of three. The fruit of the wildflower is a dry seed with a 2-inch long feathery plume. The blowing plumes appear like smoke in the wind, hence the plants name. In addition to *Geum triflorum* there are five other *Geums* in Minnesota including *G. allepicum*, *G. canadense*, *G. laciniatum*, *G. macrophyllum*, and *G. rivale*.

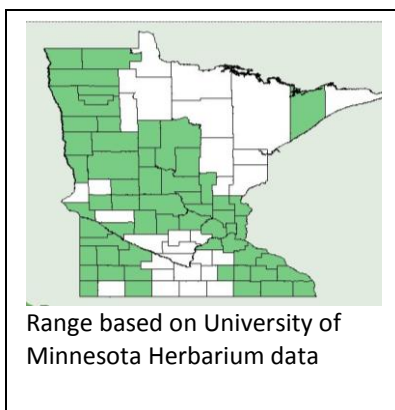


Prairie smoke leaf with dense hairs photo by Sam Shaw

## Range

Prairie Smoke is found throughout most of Minnesota with a higher concentration adjacent to the Mississippi River Valley Region and the prairies of the Southwest. It can be found in a variety of prairie settings where the surrounding vegetation is neither too dense nor tall. Plants will thrive if given enough space and sun exposure, but will

struggle with more dominant species or shady areas. Across North America, Prairie Smoke can be found throughout the Midwest and Western states and can reach as far North as the Yukon Territories. The forb is rarely seen in the Southeastern portion of the country



Prairie smoke often grows on dry bluff slopes where there is less competition from tall grasses and other flowers

## Uses

Historically the species was seen as a remedy for a wide variety of medicinal purposes. Today, prairie smoke is a favorite of pollinators, predominantly visited by bumblebees. The nectar is an ideal attractant for the bees who cross-pollinate the flowers as they frequent different plants. An attractive plant of short grass prairies, the forb provides aesthetic appeal as well as a supportive structure of fibrous and rhizomatous roots that aid in the stabilization of soil and prevent erosion. Due to the plants early bloom and clump forming growth form it is often used as a border on the edge of raingardens and lakeshore restorations. The species is sometimes planted with prairie dropseed and little bluestem in urban plantings to provide interest in the spring before the grasses become active.

### Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Ecological Restorations
- Raingardens



Clump of prairie smoke with multiple flower heads

## Planting Recommendations

Prairie smoke can tolerate a wide variety of soil types but prefers well drained soils. It also prefers full sun but can handle some shade. In raingardens and the edges of lakeshore plantings it is commonly planted from containers in the spring when there is good soil moisture available for the establishing plants. When planted from plugs they can often reach mature size by the end of the summer. For restoration projects or larger urban plantings the species can be planted from seed. The seeds require cold, moist stratification so it is recommended to plant them late in the fall so they can naturally stratify over the winter and germinate in the spring. The seeds are small, so they should be spread near the soil surface and lightly raked and/or rolled to ensure good seed to soil contact. Results from seeding can be variable and may take some time to establish.

### Planting Methods:

- Broadcast Seeding
- Containerized Plants
- Propagation by Plant Division

Once established, prairie smoke is often considered a low maintenance plant. During the early growing stages, adequate moisture is needed to assist the growth of the young plants, but once established, the plant prefers dry conditions, as it is quite tolerant of drought conditions in the wild. It is a perennial that generally does not like to be crowded, so it needs some space in a garden setting and taller plants should be avoided that may shade it out. The plant can generally self-seed or seed can be collected and spread when the seeds have completely dried out and turned a golden color. Clumps can spread from rhizomes over time and can be divided early in the spring or late in the fall as a way to propagate new plants. Prairie smoke is a plant of many uses and can be utilized in a variety of situations. Whether grown in a native prairie, as a ground cover, or a border species, the wildflower is sure to be a favorite in all types of settings.



Ripening seed with long, upright hairs

## Additional References

Illinois Wildflowers: [http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/prairie\\_smoke.html](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/prairie_smoke.html)

Minnesota Wildflowers: <http://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/prairie-smoke>