

# Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*)

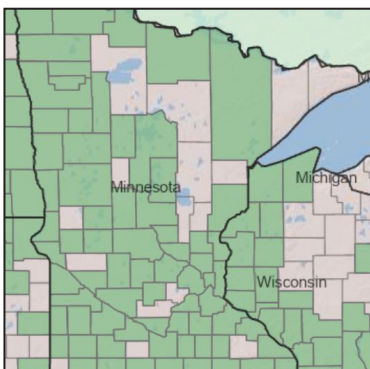
## Family: Pea (Fabaceae)

**DESCRIPTION:** Purple prairie clover is a native perennial herbaceous legume that flowers from July through August in habitats including savannas, dry and mesic prairies, roadsides and riverbanks. The plant's taproot can reach 6 feet, allowing it to fare well in drought-prone or disturbed soils.

**USES:** The plant fixes nitrogen, stabilizes erodible lands and provides forage for herbivores and pollinators. It is a pollen and nectar source for pollinators such as bumblebees, sweat bees, hoverflies and butterflies. Seven species of specialist bees in Minnesota require the plant's pollen for their larva, including five species of plasterer bee, a fairy bee, and a **longhorn bee** (pictured).

### REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)  
[Minnesota Seasons](#)  
[Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Alan Ritchie

## Planting Recommendations

Purple prairie clover can be established via seed or containerized plants. Seeds can be collected in early fall when they begin to easily dislodge from the stem. After collection, seed should be spread on a table or screen to thoroughly dry before storage. Scarify the seeds by rubbing them with a piece of sandpaper to help break the seed coat. Introducing Rhizobium bacteria to the seeds may improve plant

health and nitrogen fixation. Broadcast seeds in the spring on the soil surface, and then lightly rake or roll them to ensure good seed-to-soil contact. Cold stratification is not necessary. Protecting immature plants from deer and rabbits in smaller-scale plantings may be necessary. Containerized plants should be planted when there is sufficient soil moisture, and then watered as needed until they reach maturity.

**Developed by Alan Ritchie**, plant and pollinator ecologist, and assistant program analyst with the BWSR easement section



**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** None

**ID:** A thimble-shaped inflorescence tops unbranched, stiff stems that grow 2 to 3 feet tall. Tiny, five-petaled purple flowers with orange-yellow tipped stamens are held in a wooly, dull gray calyx (the outermost whorl of a flower). Flowers bloom in a ring, from the bottom up. The alternate, compound leaves consist of narrow, linear leaflets that smell of citrus when crushed. One seed develops in each calyx, forming a dry pod that remains attached until dislodged by wind or animals.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** White prairie clover (*Dalea candida*) has white blooms and wider leaves. Silky prairie clover (*Dalea villosa*) has pale lavender to pink blooms; wide, hairy leaves; and hairy stems. Other prairie clover species' leaves do not smell of citrus when crushed.