

Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)

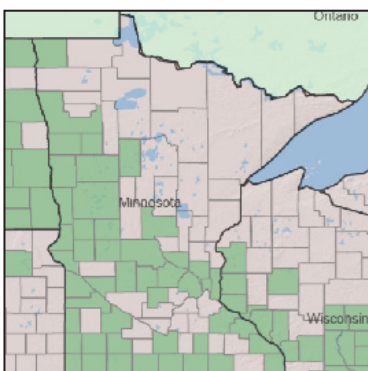
Family: Grass (Poaceae)

DESCRIPTION: With its clump-growing habit, golden fall color and ability to resist compaction by snow, prairie dropseed can be an attention-getting landscape feature year-round. It's become a popular selection for gardens, rain garden edges and restorations. The grass species is a component of dry and mesic prairies in Minnesota.

USES: The species' deep root system makes it a good choice for slope stabilizations. The foliage provides a low-growing structure for urban pollinator plantings and forage for livestock. The seeds feed sparrows and juncos. It is a host plant for several butterflies and moths, including Minnesota's collapsed population of Poweshiek skipperling (pictured) and the federally threatened Dakota skipper.

REFERENCES:

- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
- [Prairie Moon Nursery](#)
- [USDA Forest Service](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Dan Ruiter, DNR
Photo Credit (inset): Erik Runquist

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:

GP: UPL
MW: FACU
NCNE: FACU

ID: Finely textured, cascading leaves grow up to an eighth-inch wide and 1 to 2 feet long. The ligules (thin appendages where the leaves join the sheaths) have short hairs; the rest of the leaf is hairless. The flower heads are open, branching clusters 2 to 8 inches long and up to 2½ inches wide. Spikelets are lance-shaped and pointed.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Four other *Sporobolus* species are found in Minnesota. Of those, sand dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandrus*) is the most widely available commercially; its flower heads are longer, growing up to 12 inches, and its spikelets are egg-shaped.

Planting Recommendations

Prairie dropseed prefers well-drained soils and even rocky areas, but it adapts to most soils. It should be planted in full sun. When planting from containers, keep the plant from becoming root-bound by loosening and redirecting the roots. Seeds benefit from a cold moist treatment to

break dormancy, which can occur naturally by seeding in late fall. Seeds should be planted about a quarter-inch deep, by broadcasting on a prepared seedbed and then lightly raking. Plants can be propagated by separating the dense clumps in the spring or fall when the plants are dormant.

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