



# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name:** Bebb's Willow (*Salix bebbiana*)

**Plant Family:** Willow (*Salicaceae*)

Statewide Wetland  
Indicator Status:

- FACW



*Bebb's Willow growing in a wet meadow*

Growing up to twenty feet tall and thriving in a variety of moist habitats, Bebb's Willow plays an important role in stabilizing soils and providing wildlife habitats. It can be found as individual plants in wet meadows as well as in dense stands within shrub wetlands. Like other willows, it provides important early season sources of pollen and nectar for pollinators. Its ability to establish quickly and spread in riparian areas makes it well suited for buffer plantings and stream bank stabilization projects.



*Leaves have a leathery appearance on the upper surface*

## Identification

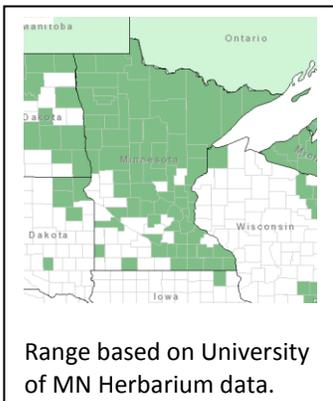
Young branches have a greenish hue that become a distinctive red-brown color with age. Older branches are rough and grey in color. The leaves are alternate, simple and oval in shape with coarsely toothed margins. They emerge in April and remain through October. The leaves have a leathery appearance on the surface and have fine hairs on both sides of the leaves. Male flowers are in catkins appearing slightly before the leaves in March and April. Each shrub will bear either male or female catkins, not both. Seeds are wind-dispersed in mid-May to early July.



*Male catkins in early spring  
Image by Lily Shaw*

## Range

Common in swamps, meadows, lakeshores, stream banks, fens, prairie swales and marshes, Bebb's willow is a widespread wetland species in Minnesota. It prefers growing in full sun and is found in both intact and degraded habitats. The species is also found from Alaska south to British Columbia and is found in most of the United States with the exception of southeast and southcentral states.



*Female catkins in late spring*

## Uses

*Salix bebbiana* is used as part of bioengineering projects to stabilize shorelines while enhancing wildlife habitat. Snowshoe hares, deer, elk, and moose all browse Bebb's willow and many small mammals and birds eat the buds, shoots and catkins. Pollinators including native flies and bees use the species as an early source of pollen and nectar. Bebb's willow is considered a type of "diamond willow" as diamond-shaped patterns form on the trunk. This pattern becomes visible when the wood is carved. Bebb's willow is carved into canes, lamp posts, and furniture. Smaller stems were historically used for baskets, arrow shafts, and fish traps. The species was also used for treating cuts and for pain relief and indigestion.

### Primary Uses:

- Bioengineering
- Wildlife Habitat
- Ethnobotanic

## Planting Recommendations

Planting can be accomplished with seed, cuttings or containerized plants. Though not as aggressive as pussy willows, Bebb's willow will spread on its own. As its seed requires no dormancy period, it can germinate quickly in the spring in a moist seedbed. Cuttings can be taken from the plant between November and March. Rooting hormones generally are not needed for cuttings as willows have a high rooting percentage.

### Planting Methods

- Seed
- Cuttings
- Containerized Plants



A number of willow species growing in a shrub wetland

## Similar Species



Pussy Willow Male Catkins



Pussy Willow Leaves



Bebb's Willow leaves

Bebb's willow is frequently mistaken as *Salix discolor* or pussy willow as they grow in similar habitats and have similar heights and form. However, the leaves provide a distinguishing feature. Bebb's willow leaves are hairy (and leather-like on the surface), while pussy willow leaves are smooth and waxy.

## References

[Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota](#) by Welby R. Smith

[Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Urban and Rural America](#) by Gary L Hightshoe

[Wetland Plants and Plant Communities of Minnesota and Wisconsin](#) by Steve Eggers and Donald M. Reed

USDA Plants Database: [http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs\\_sabe2.pdf](http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_sabe2.pdf)