

Prairie blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium campestre*)

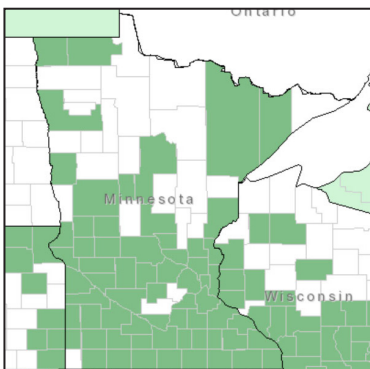
Family: Iris
(Iridaceae)

DESCRIPTION: One of the earliest forbs to bloom on the prairie, prairie blue-eyed grass' flowers, ranging from pure white to light blue, open in mid-May. This short species grows in low, wet areas and on the driest hilltops. While primarily a prairie plant, it can tolerate woodland edges.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Two closely related species are found in Minnesota. Mountain blue-eyed grass, *S. montanum*, has blue to deep violet petals. Sepals' tips are usually notched. Flowering stems are flattened and finely toothed with distinct wings on the edges; they twist as they extend up to the flowers to about the same height as the leaves. Needle-pointed blue-eyed grass, *S. mucronatum*, has blue to violet petals. Its sepals are usually rounded at the tips. Its wingless flowering stems are slender, wiry and much longer than the leaves.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[USDA NRCS Plants Database](#)



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: Tony Randazzo

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: None

ID: Usually about 8 inches tall, this perennial produces pale blue to white flowers with six petals. Flowers grow a half-inch to 1 inch wide, arranged in small clusters near the top of the stem. Winged, unbranched, smooth-edged stems look similar to iris leaves, growing about one-eighth inch wide and as tall as the leaves. Sepals are mostly rounded at the tip. The fruits, small round capsules, are ready to harvest when they redden on top. On the prairie, it's always a treat to find buried in last year's thatch.

Planting Recommendations & Uses

Prairie blue-eyed grass can grow as small, individual stems or as clumps a couple of inches in diameter. Because this tiny iris is both small and early blooming, it fits easily into nooks and crannies where larger, showier species do not. It does well in sandy to moist soils. Growing readily from seed, it requires a cold period to break dormancy. Seeds can be scattered over bare soil in the fall or kept cold over winter and then broadcast onto the last couple of inches of snow in early spring. Plants will re-seed and

spread easily if not out-competed by more aggressive species. Container plants, available from native plant nurseries, can be planted individually or as dense clumps several inches in diameter. Prairie blue-eyed grass can be used as a small accent plant in a spring wildflower garden. Because it's one of the first spring bloomers, it will attract many pollinators. No edible or medicinal uses for this species are documented. It can help stabilize soils on dry to mesic slopes.

Developed by Greg Hoch

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