

## BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Prairie Phlox (*Phlox pilosa*)

Also called: Downy Phlox

Plant Family: Polemoniaceae (Phlox)

Statewide Wetland  
Indicator Status:  
• FACU

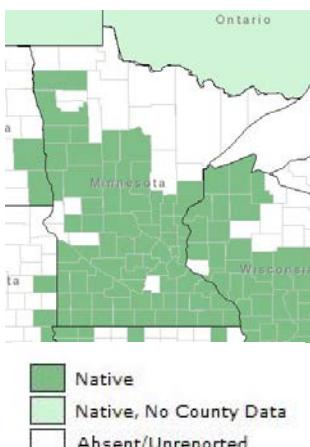


Prairie phlox flowers typically range from pink to lavender. Photo Credit: G D Bebeau, The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden

A showy perennial, prairie phlox blooms from May to July in Minnesota. Pollinators use its flat, flared petals as a landing site. It attracts a variety of butterflies, moths and native bees. Several mammals graze on it. The many varieties of phlox are distinguished by the hair, or lack thereof, on the sepals (calyx) of the plant. The calyx of prairie phlox, AKA downy phlox, is purple to green and hairy. While sometimes difficult to grow from seed, it is an attractive, fragrant and beneficial native addition to pollinator gardens, rain gardens and conservation plantings.

### Identification

Prairie phlox grows 1 to 2 feet tall. Dense, short white hairs cover the green stems, which branch at the flowers' stalks. The very narrow, opposite leaves grow about 3 inches long. They lack stems (petioles). Flower clusters appear atop the stems on short, hairy stalks. Each flower has five broad lobes. Colors typically range from pink to lavender, but can be white with deep pink or purple at the flower's base or center (corolla).



Range based on University of Minnesota Herbarium

### Range

The variety of prairie phlox most commonly found in Minnesota and throughout the Midwest is *Phlox pilosa* var. *fulgida*. While native from Louisiana north to Manitoba, it's found mostly in Minnesota and Wisconsin. It prefers prairies, open woods, limestone glades and higher quality plant communities that are managed with prescribed fire.



Prairie phlox has hairy stems.

## Uses

Many pollinators are attracted to the pleasant scent and bright colors of prairie phlox flowers. Long-tongued bees attracted to the species include bumblebees, digger bees and miner bees. Butterflies and skippers include the American lady, Northern cloudywing, swallowtails and sulfurs. Deer, rabbits and other mammals including livestock eat both flowers and plant, making it difficult to establish in places.

### Primary Uses:

- Long tongued pollinators food
- Mammals food
- Prairie plantings and pollinator gardens



Prairie phlox is a popular garden plant.

## Planting Recommendations

Prairie phlox can be a challenge to establish from seed, as it is particular about site conditions. For many projects, it is more successfully established from containerized plants. Seed should be planted in the fall to allow winter freezing and thawing to help break dormancy. Planting sites should be in full to partial sun, in well-drained, moist to mesic soil. Ideal soils are sandy loams, rich loams, or clay loams with rocky features.

### Planting Methods

- Containerized Plants
- Seed

## Similar Species



Wild Sweet William

**Photo Credit:** Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

Wild Sweet William (*Phlox maculata*) have pink to purple, five-petaled flowers that resemble prairie phlox. Among the differences: They have yellow stamens, and hairless flowers. The stem is spotted red and hairless to just slightly hairy. It is a Species of Special Concern in Minnesota.

Garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) blooms from July to September, and is taller than other native phlox species, reaching 2 to 6 feet. The hairless or slightly hairy stem branches in the upper part. Often cultivated in nurseries, its flowers range from white to light pink or purple. Native to eastern and southern Minnesota, it's found elsewhere spreading from gardens.

Dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) is in the mustard family, identified by its four rounded petals and alternate leaves. Dame's rocket is invasive and common in disturbed soils.



Garden phlox Photo

**Credit:** Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Dame's rocket Photo

**Credit:** Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

## References

<http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org>, <http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info>,  
<https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info>, <https://plants.usda.gov>, <https://www.prairiemoon.com>,  
<https://www.thebutterflysite.com>,

Developed by Amy Workman and Dan Shaw