

Prairie onion (*Allium stellatum*)

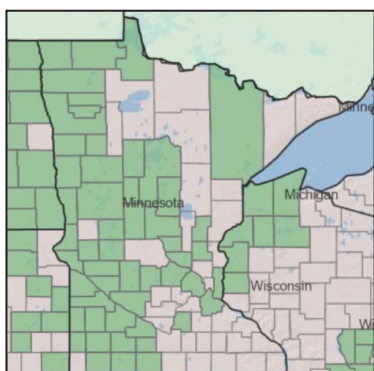
Family: Lily (Liliaceae)

DESCRIPTION: Known for its round umbel of pink, white or lavender flowers that appear to burst open like six-pointed stars, prairie onion makes an attractive addition to native gardens. Also known as autumn onion, this drought-tolerant wildflower found throughout the state blooms from June to September.

USES: An edible plant, prairie onion was known for its healing properties. Native Americans historically used the plant to treat congestion, fevers and infections. The species provides pollen and nectar for pollinators including native bees and flies, wasps and butterflies. The plant's strong onion taste is unpalatable for many mammals including cattle, deer and rabbits.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)
[Missouri Department of Conservation](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Dan Shaw

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: None

ID: This plant grows 1 to 2 feet tall, with stems topped by round umbels up to 2 inches wide composed of quarter-inch-long lavender, pink or white flowers. The long stem is accompanied by a few grasslike blades that can grow as long as the plant is tall. Leaves have an onion smell. The bulbs are round to oval.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Nodding wild onion (*Allium cernuum*), a Minnesota threatened species, is distinguished by its bent stalk, which causes the flower head to nod downward. It is found in southeastern Minnesota counties.

Planting Recommendations

Prairie onion prefers full sun and dry conditions, such as rock gardens and dry-mesic areas. It also thrives in average-to-rich soils, if it is not competing with tall, aggressive plants. The plant can be propagated by separating the bulbs in early spring, ideally between March and early May. Bulbs should be planted 4 to 8 inches deep, with other low-growing plants and flowers. Patience is key, as it usually takes three years after propagation for the bulb

to form and plants to mature. The small, black seeds can be collected once seedheads turn brown and dry in the fall. Seeds can be planted in March and April after 60 days of cold-moist stratification, or directly sown in the fall when winter conditions will break dormancy. Propagation leads to faster blooms compared with seed germination. Good companion plants include purple coneflower and prairie dropseed.

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