



# Medicinal and Edible Plants of the Great Plains

Life on the Great Plains is not easy. The extreme weather conditions crafted the ingenuity and survival skills of the Plains Indians tribes.

## Black Sampson



## Butterfly Milkweed



The Plains Indians discovered an array of medicinal and edible plants, as well as their value for other purposes such as household chores and hunting.

Throughout the state of Kansas there is an abundance of edible and medicinal plants that come in various species.

### Black Sampson

Black Sampson *Echinacea angustifolia* has medicinal properties that boosts the immune system and is believed to ward off colds and the flu. Black Sampson may also have anti-inflammatory properties. It is not recommended to be taken at high doses because the effectiveness decreases

The roots can be chewed to treat toothaches and create numbness in the mouth. The plant can also be boiled and turned into tea to treat snake bites, spider bites, cancers, sore throats, burns, hard-to-heal sores, and wounds.  
Height: 6-24 in.  
Blooms: Throughout Kansas June - July

### Butterfly Milkweed

Butterfly Milkweed *Asclepias tuberosa* attracts various species of butterflies and many insects. Historically, Native Americans and pioneers used the roots to treat respiratory problems, which is how the name "pleurisy root" originated. The plant is an important food source for Monarch Butterflies, it does not contain milky latex.

Found: Eastern Kansas in prairies, roadsides, and waste places; dry, sandy or rocky soils.  
Height: 18 – 30 inches.  
Blooms: June - August

### Plains Sunflower

Some of the Plains Tribes used the plains sunflower *Helianthus petiolaris* for dances and for good luck. The Hopi mixed dried, grounded petals with cornmeal to use as yellow face powder for ceremonial dances. The Navajo made a liquid from the plant which was sprinkled on their clothing to bring them good luck while hunting.

Found: Throughout Kansas in open prairies and roadsides; dry, sandy or rocky soils.  
Height: 2 - 5 feet  
Blooms: June - September.





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## Purple Prairie Clover

Many people may recognize the purple prairie clover *Dalea purpurea* as it is a popular gardening plant. The plant is high in protein and has a high graze value as it is nutritious for livestock.; primarily popular among sheep and goats. It was also used as an emergency food source among the Plains Indians. The leaves when boiled have a constipating effect when drinking as a tea. The roots were used as chewing by Native Americans because of the sweet taste. The steeped and bruised leaves when turned into a poultice can be applied to fresh wounds. A decoction of the leaves and blossoms has been used in the treatment of heart problems and diarrhea. Native Americans also used the tough stems to make brooms.

Found: Throughout Kansas in prairies, hillsides, open wooded sites, roadsides, in dirt and rocky soils.  
Height: 8 - 36 inches  
Blooms: June - August



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## White Prairie Clover

White prairie clover *Dalea candida* has high nutritious value and is readily grazed by livestock. In overgrazed areas it will disappear. The Plains Indians steeped the dried leaves to make tea and also used the leaves for medicine to treat wounds. The roots were chewed because of the sweet taste. The taproot can descend to 6 feet.

Found: Throughout Kansas in prairies, waste areas, roadsides, hillsides, open woods, and often rocky soils.  
Height: 1 – 3 feet  
Blooms: June - August

