

## Tall Coreopsis

*Coreopsis tripteris*

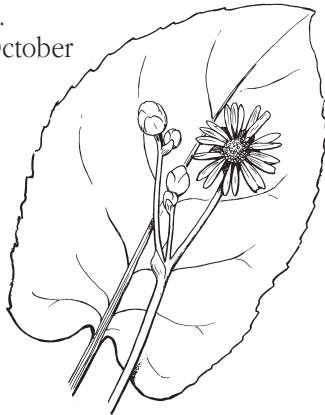
Yellow, anise-scented flowers with brown centers on very tall stalks.  
 Blooms: July-October  
 Height: 3-9 feet



## Prairie-dock

*Silphium terebinthinaceum*

Yellow flowers on tall stalks. Leaves are large, oval or somewhat heart-shaped and located near base of plant.  
 Blooms: August-October  
 Height: 4-10 feet



Artwork for this brochure is from: Ohio Department of Natural Resources publications, *Seasons of the Tallgrass Prairie*, *Manual of the Grasses of the United States*, *The Monocotyledoneae*, and *A Field Guide to Wildflowers*.



# MEET OUR PRAIRIE PLANTS



## The Prairies of Ohio

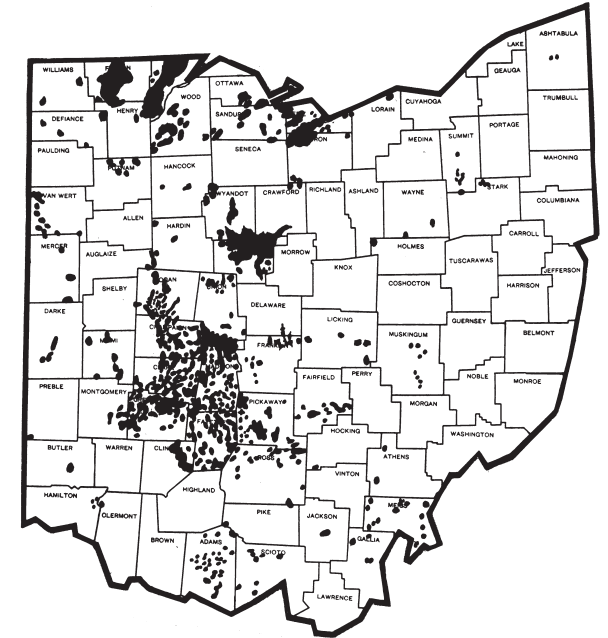
At the time of pioneer settlement, more than 300 natural prairie areas existed in Ohio. Most were small, but some spread into several townships.

The prairies of Ohio were for the most part tallgrass prairies with vegetation sometimes reaching heights of ten feet. They were dominated by grasses like big bluestem, Indian grass, little bluestem and switch-grass. A variety of other sun-loving, deep-rooted plants grew among the grasses. These plants reached their flowering peak in mid-to-late summer.

No one knows when prairies first developed in the state. They may have existed in unglaciated Ohio before or between glacial advances. Following Ohio's last glaciation, the climate became warmer and drier. This trend continued until, about 4000 years ago, semi-arid conditions prevailed in Ohio and western prairies expanded eastward into the state. In time, the climate changed and became more humid. The humid conditions allowed forests to return and reclaim much of Ohio. By the late 1700s, Ohio's continuous prairie had become isolated pockets in extremely wet or dry areas where prairie plants could compete successfully with forest vegetation.

Ohio's prairies survived the early pioneer times. Because they lacked trees, their soils were thought to be infertile and unfit for farming. Eventually, plows did turn the rich prairie soil and many of Ohio's native plants disappeared forever.

MetroParks is now bringing back prairie plants as part of our Land Stewardship Program which is aimed at developing and maintaining a diversity of natural habitats. Prairie vegetation is being planted in former farmland. To prevent woody plants from taking over, the prairie areas are periodically mowed or burned. Burning does not harm the deep-rooted prairie plants, but does inhibit tree seedlings and shrubs.



prairies of Ohio around 1800

## Discover Prairie Plants

Following are some of the plants that were found in the prairies of Ohio when European settlers arrived and have now been reintroduced into MetroParks prairie areas. How many can you find?

As you discover these plants, notice some of their special adaptations that have allowed them to survive the stress of the hot summer sun. Many prairie plants have finely divided or slender leaves which improve air circulation, lower air temperature and decrease evaporation. Others have leaves that are close to the ground so only their flowers are raised into the drying winds. Some prairie plants rely on thick, tough leaves and stems to prevent loss of moisture, or on fuzzy or hairy leaves to hold moisture and reflect sunlight. These adaptations, along with others like a deep root system and ability to withstand fire, have allowed prairie plants to survive under harsh natural conditions.

# In MetroParks Prairie Areas

## Big Bluestem

*Andropogon gerardi*

Flower head resembles a turkey's foot.  
Height: 3-10 feet



## Indian Grass

*Sorghastrum nutans*

Tawny to brown plume-like seed head. Leaf blades long and tapering to a narrow base.  
Height: 3-8 feet



## Switch-grass

*Panicum virgatum*

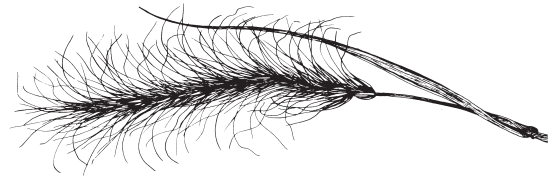
Graceful, loose seed head.  
Height: 4-7 feet



## Nodding Wild-rye

*Elymus canadensis*

Also known as Canada wild-rye. Stems are somewhat woody and stout. After seed heads appear, they nod downward.  
Height: 4-6 feet



## Purple Coneflower

*Echinacea purpurea*

Reddish-purple flower with swept-back petals and orangish centers.  
Blooms: June-October  
Height: 2-3 feet



## Saw-toothed Sunflower

*Helianthus grosseserratus*

Yellow flowers with yellow centers. Leaves are narrow, toothed and often whitish-downy beneath.  
Blooms: July-October  
Height: 3-10 feet



## Stiff Goldenrod

*Solidago rigida*

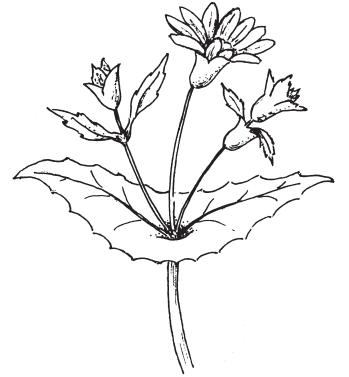
Yellow flowers form flat-topped clusters. Upper leaves are stiff, oval and woolly.  
Blooms: August-October  
Height: 1-5 feet



## Cup-plant

*Silphium perfoliatum*

Yellow flowers. Upper leaves form a shallow cup around the stem. Stems are smooth and 4-sided.  
Blooms: July-September  
Height: 4-8 feet



## Gray-headed Coneflower

*Ratibida pinnata*

Long, yellow, swept-back petals. Dull-colored centers smell like anise when crushed and turn gray as seeds mature.  
Blooms: June-September  
Height: 3-5 feet

