

Top Lists for Colorado Plants: Eleven (11) Categories

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[Please e-mail additions or suggested changes]

Bird-watchers keep life lists of the birds they have seen. In Colorado about 500 bird species have been sighted. In comparison, there are more than 2,300 plant species in Colorado – a much longer list. The following short lists were developed to help naturalists or “budding” botanists identify some of the more interesting plant species in Colorado. Interesting is a very subjective term, but most people identify with certain groupings of plants, such as edible, aromatic, poisonous or rare.

The following lists are in 11 categories. Ten of these are exclusive to the eastern plains. One of gives credit for knowing folklore or plant-use stories about a plant: there is more to a plant than its scientific name. The last category is a list of non-steppe, but Colorado plants. Others could be easily added to this mountain or non-steppe list, but Plainsman Pete’s homeland is the eastern plains. The subjective rankings in each category uses number one as the “best” in that category, and so on down the list. Debate about possible rearrangements or additions are encouraged.

As with any legitimate checklist, spaces are also provided for check marks. Alternatively, the date or location a plant was first seen could serve as a check. A few categories have 2 possible checks per species, such as one check for seeing a plant and another for tasting (if edible), smelling (if aromatic) or if you have been affected or have been or have seen an animal affected (or even killed) by a particular poisonous plant.

On the last page you will be able to calculate (and update from time to time) your Personal Plant Proficiency or P³ score. It is a good idea to work through this list and tally your check marks before and again after a field trip. The hope is that you will slowly attain a higher P³ score – but you will have to work at it. The highest P³ rank is curmudgeon, a rank that has been attained by Plainsman Pete and a very few others.

I. Top Edible Plants of the Eastern CO Plains

Seen / Eaten or at least sampled

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| _____ / _____ | 1. Prairie biscuit (<i>Cymopterus montanus</i>) Apicaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 2. Plains Prickly Pear Cactus (<i>Opuntia polyacantha</i>) Cactaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 3. Wild onion (<i>Allium textile</i>) Liliaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 4. Soapweed, Spanish bayonett (<i>Yucca glauca</i>) Agavaceae Amole |
| _____ / _____ | 5. Breadroot, timsila (<i>Pedimelon esculentum</i>) Fabaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 6. Hog potato, Indian rush pea, camote de ratón (<i>Hoffmanseggia glauca</i>)
Fabaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 7. Pepperweed (<i>Lepidium densiflorum</i>) Brassicaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 8. Choke cherry (<i>Prunus virginiana</i>) Rosaceae Rasputin stomach |
| _____ / _____ | 9. Golden currant (<i>Ribes aureum</i>) Grossuluriaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 10. Rose Hips (<i>Rosa woodsii</i>) Rosaceae |
| _____ / _____ | 11. Ground plum (<i>Astragalus crassicaarpus</i>) Fabaceae “to go with seed” |
| _____ / _____ | 12. Pale wolfberry (<i>Lycium pallidum</i>) Solanaceae |

II. Top Plants with Aromatic Foilage of the Eastern CO Plains

Seen / Experienced the Aroma

- ___ / ___ 1. **Sagebrush** (*Artemisia spp.*) Asteraceae [*A. frigida* (female), *A. ludoviciana* (male)]
- ___ / ___ 2. **Fetid marigold / Prairie dog weed** (*Dyssodia papposa*) Asteraceae
- ___ / ___ 3. **Rough and Drummond's false pennyroyal**
(*Hedeoma hispidum* or *H. drummondii*) Lamiaceae "Poleo"
- ___ / ___ 4. **Wild onion** (*Allium textile*) Alliaceae
- ___ / ___ 5. **Field Mint** (*Mentha arvensis*) Hides hunter's scent in the field
- ___ / ___ 6. **Hop tree, cola de zorrillo** (*Ptelea trifoliata*) Aroma of *Eleodes*
- ___ / ___ 7. **White & Purple prairie clover** (*Dalea candid* or *D. purpurea*) Fabaceae
- ___ / ___ 8. **Lemon scurf-pea** (*Pediomelon lanceolata*) Fabaceae
- ___ / ___ 9. **Skunkbush, Lemonade bush** (*Rhus trilobata*) Anacardiaceae "Lemita"
- ___ / ___ 10. **Wild tarragon** (*Artemisia dracunculus*) Asteraceae
- ___ / ___ 11. **Watson's Goosefoot** (*Chenopodium watsonii*) Amaranthaceae "Inner tube air"
- ___ / ___ 12. **Tumble ringweed** (*Cycloloma atriplicifolium*) Amaranthaceae "Lightning smell"

III. Top Flower Fragrances of the Eastern CO Plains

- ___ 1. **Sweet Sand or Snowball Verbena** (*Abronia fragrans*) Nyctaginaceae
- ___ 2. **Chocolate Flower** (*Berlandiera lyrata*) Asteraceae Aromatic only in the am.
- ___ 3. **Choke Cherry** (*Prunus virginiana*) or **American plum** (*Prunus americana*)
- ___ 4. **Clump slenderlobe / Butterscotch Mat Flowers**
(*Leptodactylon caespitosum*) Polemoniaceae
- ___ 5. **Golden currant or anise bush** (*Ribes aureum*) Grossulariaceae
- ___ 6. **Wild rose** (*Rosa woodsii*) Rosaceae
- ___ 7. **James' cryptantha** (*Cryptantha cinerea*) Boraginaceae "Minor Scandal"

IV. Top Medicinal Plants of the Eastern CO Plains (* = alkaloid-rich)

seen / personally used as a medicine

- ___ / ___ 1. **Prickly Poppy*** (*Argemone polyanthemus* & *A. hispida*) Papaveraceae
- ___ / ___ 2. **Chia, Lanceleaf sage** (*Salvia reflexa*) Lamiaceae
- ___ / ___ 3. **Wild onion, textile onion** (*Allium textile*) Liliaceae
- ___ / ___ 4. **Gumweed*, Yerba del buey** (*Grindelia squarrosa*) Asteraceae
- ___ / ___ 5. **Wild licorice** (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) Fabaceae "stick to a man"
- ___ / ___ 6. **Field mint** (*Mentha arvensis*) Lamiaceae
- ___ / ___ 7. **Woolly plantain** (*Plantago prushii*) Plantaginaceae "white man's foot"
- ___ / ___ 8. **White prairie clover** (*Dalea candida*) Fabaceae
- ___ / ___ 9. **Hoary puccoon** (*Lithospermum incisum*) Boraginaceae PPU
- ___ / ___ 10. **Silky Locoweed*** (*Sophora nuttalliana*) Fabaceae: mescal bean's cousin

V. Top Poisonous/Stinging Plants of the Eastern CO Plains. Check once if seen and again if you have been irritated or have seen an animal irritated (killed) by this plant. (*alkaloid-rich)

- | Seen | Affected (you or some other animal) | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| _____ / _____ | | 1. Geyer's larkspur* (<i>Delphinium geyeri</i>) Ranunculaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 2. Plains larkspur* (<i>Delphinium carolinianum</i>) Ranunculaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 3. Water Hemlock (<i>Cicuta maculata</i> var. <i>angustifolia</i>) Apiaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 4. Poison Hemlock (<i>Conium maculatum</i>) Apiaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 5. Locoweeds, Poison vetches (<i>Oxytropis</i> and/or <i>Astragalus</i>) Fabaceae
(<i>Oxytropis sericea</i> , <i>O. lambertii</i> , <i>O. besseyi</i> , <i>Astragalus bisulcatus</i> , etc.) |
| _____ / _____ | | 6. Death Camas* (<i>Zigadenus</i> , <i>Toxicoscordion</i>) Melanthiaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 7. Poison Suckleya (<i>Suckleya suckleyana</i>) Amaranthaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 8. Noseburn (<i>Tragia racemosa</i>) Euphorbiaceae |
| _____ / _____ | | 9. Poison ivy (<i>Toxicodendron rydbergii</i>) Anacardiaceae “my friend” |
| _____ / _____ | | 10. Nettles (<i>Urtica dioica</i>) Urticaceae |

VI. The Most Rare Plants of the Eastern CO Plains

- | | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Xeric Alpine clover (<i>Trifolium anemophilum</i>) Fabaceae |
| _____ | 2. Moonwort (<i>Botrychium campestre</i>) Ophioglossaceae “Invisivble seeds” |
| _____ | 3. Taproot fleabane (<i>Erigeron radicans</i>) Asteraceae |
| _____ | 4. Summer Orophaca (<i>Orophaca hyalina</i>) Fabaceae |
| _____ | 5. Alpine Fever Few (<i>Parthenium alpinum</i> var. <i>alpinum</i>) Asteraceae |
| _____ | 6. Colorado Green Gentian (<i>Frasera coloradensis</i>) Gentianaceae |
| _____ | 7. Arkansas Valley Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera harringtonii</i>) Onagraceae |
| _____ | 8. Nuttall's Biscuitroot (<i>Lomatium nuttallii</i>) Apiaceae |
| _____ | 9. Plains Ragweed (<i>Ambrosia linearis</i>) Asteraceae |
| _____ | 10. Wheel Flower (<i>Asclepias uncialis</i> subsp. <i>uncialis</i>) Asclepiadaceae |
| _____ | 11. Showy Prairie Gentian (<i>Eustoma grandiflorum</i>) Gentianaceae |

VII. Top Plant of the Eastern CO Plains with Seeds that Stick to you Socks.

Check only if these have been found in your socks – do not check if you intentionally walk over these plant to get seeds in your socks.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Cheatgrass / downy brome (<i>Bromus tectorum</i>) Poaceae |
| _____ | 2. Stickseed (<i>Lappula occidentalis</i>) Boraginaceae |
| _____ | 3. Six-weeks fescue (<i>Vulpia ocofiflora</i>) Poaceae (w/climate change = 5 ½ wk. fescue) |
| _____ | 4. Annual cryptantha (<i>Cryptantha minima</i>) Boraginaceae |
| _____ | 5. Bur-marigold (<i>Bidens cernua</i>) Asteraceae |

VIII. Most Photographed Plants Check if you have photographed this plant.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| _____ | 1. Blue grama - our state grass (<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>) Poaceae |
| _____ | 2. Sunflowers (<i>Helianthus annuus</i> and <i>H. petiolaris</i>) Asteraceae “looking at you” |
| _____ | 3. Cacti (<i>Opuntia polyacantha</i> , <i>O. macorhiza</i> or <i>O. imbricata</i>) Cactaceae |
| _____ | 4. Soapweed (<i>Yucca glauca</i>) Asparagaceae (or Agavaceae) |
| _____ | 5. Gumbo Lily (<i>Oenothera albicaulis</i>) Onagraceae [probably with flea beetles] |
| _____ | 6. Scarlet Globemallow, Cowboy's Delight (<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>) Malvaceae |
| _____ | 7. Any other flower (or plant) with a butterfly on it. |

IX. Top Invasive, Non-native Plants on the Eastern CO Plains

- 1. **Dalmatian Toadflax** (*Linaria genistifolia*) Plantaginaceae [mesic steppe, roadsides]
- 2. **Cheatgrass** (*Bromus tectorum*) Poaceae [steppe, disturbed areas]
- 3. **Canadian thistle** (*Cirsium arvense*) Asteraceae [riparian]
- 4. **Tumbleweed** (*Salsola iberica*) Amaranthaceae [disturbed areas]
- 5. **Alkali weed** (*Kochia scoparia*) Amaranthaceae [riparian, roadsides]
- 6. **Tackbur or Goathead** (*Tribulus terrestris*) Zygophyllaceae [roadsides]
- 7. **Jim Hill or Tumble Mustard** (*Sisymbrium altissimum*) [roadsides, disturbed areas]
- 8. **Tansy mustard** (*Descurainia sophia*) Brassicaceae [riparian, roadsides]
- 9. **Wild rye** (*Secale cereale*) Poaceae [roadsides]
- 10. **Blue mustard** (*Chorispora tenella*) Brassicaceae [roadsides]

X. Plants with the most interesting Folklore, Natural, or Unnatural History Stories

Check if you have heard one of these stories: there are sometimes several per species.

- 1. **Stick-to-a Man, Wild Licorice**: jealousy (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) Fabaceae
- 2. **Timpsila, Breadroot, Prairie Turnip**: Compensatory planting by Crow, Lakota (*Pediomelum esculentum*) Fabaceae
- 3. **Devils Claw** (*Proboscidea louisianica*): food, fiber, fangs Martyniaceae
- 4. **Locoweeds** (*Oxytropis* and *Astragalus*): evil spirits Fabaceae
- 5. **Chokecherry** (*Prunus virginiana*): Rasputin stomach Rosaceae
- 6. **Illinois bundleflower** (*Desmanthus illinoensis*): basement shaman, psychonauts
- 7. **Chia, Lanceleaf Sage**, (*Salvia reflexa*): Lamiaceae Aztec staple
- 8. **Tumbleweed** (*Salsola iberica*): Amaranthaceae Lonesome, free, but still exotic.
- 9. **Soapweed** (*Yucca glauca*): Agavaceae food, fiber, Yucca moths
- 10. **Prickly Pear Cacti** (*Opuntia* spp.): Cactaceae Thigmotactic stamens

XI. Top useful and/or storied Colorado plants from non-steppe areas (i.e. mountains)

- 1. **Oshá** (*Ligusticum porteri* J. M. Coult & Rose): Apiaceae Dirty sock smell
- 2. **Bear root** (*Lomatium dissectum* (Nutt.) Mathias & Constance): Apiaceae For virus
- 3. **Hops** (*Humulus lupulus* L.): Cannabaceae Sedative
- 4. **Arnica** (*Arnica cordifolia* Hooker & *Arnica fulgens* Pursh): Asteraceae Bruises
- 5. **Baneberry** (*Actaea rubra* (Aiton) Willdenow): Ranunculaceae Doll's eyes
- 6. **Yampa** (*Perideridia gairdeneri* (Hook. & Arn.) Mathias): Apiaceae Almost our state
- 7. **Colorado ginseng** (*Lepidium crenatum*): Brassicaceae Aphrodisiac? (*Maca* in Peru)

How to Calculate Your Prairie Plant Proficiency (P³) Score

The total number of species listed above is about 100. If you have seen a particular plant and are certain you can recognize it if you see it again, you may place a check by that species name. Some plants occur in several categories. Tally all checks and consult the table below to determine your score. There is much more to a plant than knowing their scientific name, so “ethnobotanical” points are awarded for using a medicinal plants, tasting, smelling, or experiencing a poisonous, not necessarily first had, the affects of a poisonous plant. There is a possible grand total of 145 points. Tally your score and consult the following scale to determine you rank. Plainsman Pete likes to point out that it is possible to attain the top rank on this scale (barely) without going to the mountains. This is a life list, so update your rank as often as possible.

Prairie Plant Proficiency (P³) Scale

- >138 points:** Curmudgeon of the plains (Plainsman Pete’s rank).
- 110 - 138 points:** Eccentric steppe botanist: an unrelenting passion for prairie plants.
- 100 - 109 points:** Steppe botanist: advanced knowledge of prairie plants.
- 80 - 99 points:** Journeyman steppe botanist: inspired to learn and to see prairie plants.
- 60 - 79 points:** Good start as a steppe botanist: You have learned and can ID quite a few prairie plants, but you seldom visit eastern Colorado.
- 40 - 59 points:** Advanced novice: You know the most common plants & a few others.
- 20 - 39 points:** Novice: You have had few opportunities to learn steppe plants. Most of the plants you checked on this list were not seen on the steppe. Most steppe plants have large geographical ranges.
- 10 - 19 points:** Beginner: You have made only a few efforts to learn steppe plants.
- 0 - 9 points:** You are very unaware of steppe plants: you may be a birder.