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## RESEARCH BULLETINS OF THE SOUTH DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION (1887-2011)

### Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains

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Department of Plant Science

#### Description

This guide is a revision and expansion of an earlier book, *Plants of South Dakota Grasslands*, the idea for which originated with Dr. James T. Nichols, one of its authors. During its development, Dr. Nichols was a faculty member at South Dakota State University, stationed at the Newell Field Station. James R. Johnson was his assistant, and in that first book, with brief narratives and photographs, they provided a guide to range and pasture plants common to South Dakota. It was a highly popular publication, revised slightly and re-released in a 1982 edition, long out of print.

This publication is intended for persons interested in the grasslands of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains. With the necessary exception of scientific names and some terminology, plant narratives are intentionally nontechnical. Technical terms are defined in the glossary. The authors hope that this bulletin will be of value to those interested in plants for aesthetic reasons, and will provide pertinent information helpful to ranchers, farmers, conservationists, and students.

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We now understand that native grassland plants have incredibly deep roots that hold soil in place, help to store water, and filter the air. They are specially adapted to hold this habitat together in ways that most crops cannot. The 2018 Plowprint Report shows that approximately 58,000 acres of grasslands were plowed up in the Northern Great Plains portion of the state last year. And the hardest hit areas in South Dakota are among the very same as those decimated by the Dust Bowl. Though conversion of grasslands to croplands declined across the Great Plains in 2017, it's nearly doubled in South Dakota. From cattle to grassland birds and bison, a diverse array of species depend on healthy, intact grasslands. The Great Plains are the westernmost portion of the vast North American Interior Plains, which extend east to the Appalachian Plateau. The region is a high plateau that ranges from an altitude at the base of the Rocky Mountains of 5,000 to 6,000 feet (1,500 to 1,800 m) to 1,500 feet at the eastern edge. The isolated mountainous areas, such as the Black Hills of South Dakota and the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma, are like islands in the prairie and often contain species whose nearest relatives may be hundreds of miles away. Along rivers, streams and the many

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