

Prairie Plants

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*):

- This is the most prominent grass in the prairie. It is a native grass which is about 3 to 8 feet tall. The culm is tan and hairless. Leaf blades are up to 1.5 inches long, alternate, dull green to glaucous blue, and hairless.

Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*):

- This grass is 3 to 7 feet tall and unbranched. The leaf blades are flat and hairless, alternate, dull to dark green, and about 2 inches in length. It has flowering light green or pale yellow culms.

Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*):

- Purple Coneflower is up to 3.5 feet in height, and stems are covered in scattered white hairs. The flower's central cone is dark red to brown, surrounded by 10-20 purple rays, and blooms in mid summer.

Prairie Dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*):

- Leaves have a sandpaper texture on the bottom side, are up to 18 inches long, and leaf margins are serrated. Flower stalks are hairless and green or red. The yellow flowers are 2-3 inches in diameter, consist of 15-30 rays, and bloom in late summer.

Smooth Aster (*Aster laevis*):

- The aster ranges from 1.5 to 3 feet in height. Leaves are alternate and about 4 inches in length. Stems and leaves are both hairless, and leaves have smooth margins. Flowers consist of 15-30 bright violet rays with yellow disc florets; the head of each flower is about 3/4 inch in diameter.

Common Crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*):

- This is an introduced grass, ranging from 1 to 3 feet in height. It has several light green branching culms at the base which are mostly covered by sheaths. Leaves are in an alternate arrangement and up to 6 inches in height with entire margins and are often hairy toward the base.

Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*):

- The Black-Eyed Susan stands about 2 feet tall in height, with each stalk containing a single composite flower. Its greyish green alternate leaves can be up to 7 inches in length and are covered with stiff hairs. The flower has up to 20 bright yellow ray florets surrounding its numerous dark brown disk florets. These flowers bloom for about one month, from mid to late summer.

About the Preserve

The LeSuer Nature Preserve is dedicated to the late William and Arlene Snow LeSuer who provided financial support for both the Haldeman-Thiessen Science Center and the preserve. Both graduated from Monmouth College with science degrees in 1942.

LeSuer consists of five different ecological habitats: pine plantation, oak savannah, floodplain woodlands, riparian zone, and grassland prairie. Each of these habitats provides a plant community that allows a unique set of fauna to thrive.

Monmouth College biology and environmental science students are able to utilize the LeSuer Nature Preserve for research purposes. Often, you may see flags throughout the preserve marking invasive species, or small traps placed in the prairie for ecological studies. Please avoid interfering with any indicators of research.

Each year, the grassland prairie is burned for maintenance. Wildfires occur naturally, but today carefully controlled burns are used to eliminate invasive plants and weeds, as well as to provide other benefits. Prairie species have special adaptations that allow them to survive such burning.

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<http://www.monm.edu/featured/2002/lesuer/index.htm>

LeSuer Nature Preserve



Address:

Corner of North 11th
Street and Highway 34

Animals

White tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*):

- These herbivorous mammals are found in Southern Canada and Central America. Males are called bucks, and females are called does. Bucks grow antlers, which they use in sparring matches, annually during the winter. They have a reddish-brown coat in the summer and a grayish-brown coat in the winter. During mating season, from November to February, does give birth to 1 to 3 offspring. White tailed deer can be seen browsing at dawn or dusk, eating twigs, acorns, herbs, and grass.

Beaver (*Caster canadensis*):

- The beaver is North America's largest rodent. It has webbed hind feet, a flat and nearly hairless tail, dark brown fur on its dorsal side, and light brown fur on its ventral side. Castoreum, an oily secretion from glands, allows the beaver to be waterproof, while long, sharp incisors allow it to cut into trees and woody vegetation. Beavers are territorial and live in colonies near water. Their diet consists of bark and cambium, and beavers mate for life producing one litter per year. They can live to be 20 years old!

Prairie vole (*Microtus ochrogaster*):

- Prairie voles have grayish brown to black fur with yellowish underbellies. They live in burrows in the central grasslands of North America and are highly social. Litter size ranges from 1 to 7 offspring, and prairie voles have a high mortality rate due to predation, disease, and scarce vegetation. Although their lifespan is short (typically 1-2 years), they serve as an important food source for predators.

Deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*):

- This small, white-footed mouse has brownish-red fur and a bicolor tail which is dorsally dark and ventrally light. The tail is longer than its body. It lives in burrows in a variety of habitats. Deer mice are almost strictly nocturnal and easily preyed upon.

American toad (*Bufo americanus*):

- These toads are insectivores that live in semi-permanent freshwater sources. They rely on dense patches of vegetation for cover and hunting and hibernate during the winter. American toads have red and yellow warts, short legs and stout bodies, and a small stripe in their middle, broad stripes on their sides, and brown skin. Their throats puff out when they give a long, trill sounding call. They breed in March or April and survive only a year or two in the wild.