

CHIEFSWOOD NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

• Where Cultures Meet •

RESTORED TALL GRASS PRAIRIE

What is a tall grass prairie?

A tall grass prairie is a natural ecosystem once commonly found throughout southwestern Ontario, especially in the Carolinian zone. A tall grass prairie features a great diversity of grasses, wild flowers and animal life.

Why are tall grass prairies important?

Tall grass prairies were once found throughout the central United States, southern Ontario and Manitoba. In Ontario only 1% of original tall grass prairie remains. Much of Ontario's tall grass prairie has been lost to agriculture and urbanization. Tall grass prairies support over 200 species of indigenous plants, many rarely found elsewhere, and a great diversity of birds, insects, mammals and other wildlife. It is the most threatened ecosystem in Ontario, and many rare, threatened and endangered species of wildlife make tall grass prairies their home. Important pollinators, including many species of butterflies and bees, rely on the tall grass prairie.

Fire and the tall grass prairie

Plants native to the tall grass prairie have deep root stems, and have adapted to periodic wildfires. Fire helps to return nutrients to the soil, heat up the ground for plant growth, and keeps out invasive and non-native plants. In the absence of wildfires, prescribed burns, or deliberately set controlled fires, are used to help maintain the tall grass prairie.

Chiefswood's tall grass prairie

As part of the restoration of Chiefswood National Historic Site, a Historic Landscape Conservation Study was conducted in 1997 and 1998 to determine the historic uses of Chiefswood's grounds. The study recommended planting a tall grass prairie to recreate the indigenous flora. Indigenous plants were introduced at Chiefswood starting in 1997. Today visitors to Chiefswood's tall grass prairie can learn about the traditional medicinal and other uses of its plants and enjoy this important part of Ontario's natural heritage.

Penstemon Digitalis • Smooth Beardtongue (continued)



SPRING BLOOMS



RESTORED TALL

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GRASS PRAIRIE



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SPRING BLOOMS

Tradescantia Ohiensis • Ohio Spiderwort



Description

Blue or purple flowers, 3/4 - 1 1/2" wide with broad petals; 3 round petals. Flowers in umbel-like clusters with 2 long, leaflike bracts below the flower cluster. Leaves long and narrow. 8-36" high. Leaves whitened with a bloom; sepals hairy only at the tip, if at all, and flower stalks smooth. Spring and summer. Spiderwort family.

Uses

Cherokee - used spiderwort as an ingredient in several preparations for female and kidney problems. They used a tea for digestive problems and would rub crushed leaves on insect bites (stings). A root poultice was used for cancer.

Young leaves and stems edible raw or boiled. Flowers can be candied.



Penstemon Digitalis •
Smooth Beardtongue



Description

Stem smoothish; pale purple or violet flowers 3/4" long. Trumpet-shaped, in a terminal cluster. The leaves are oblong or lance-shaped and finely toothed 1-4' high. Late spring early summer. Figwort family.