



FORBS

Status: Common Native

PASQUE FLOWER

(*Anemone patens*)

State Flower of South Dakota

Description

Springtime on the prairie - longer days, warmer sunshine, melting snow and... the pasque flower. While many of the other plants in South Dakota haven't even turned green, the pasque flower is peaking above the snow, with its white, pink, or purplish, tulip-like blossoms already open. The flower's common name is French for Easter, and refers to the plant's habit of flowering between late March and early June, depending on location.

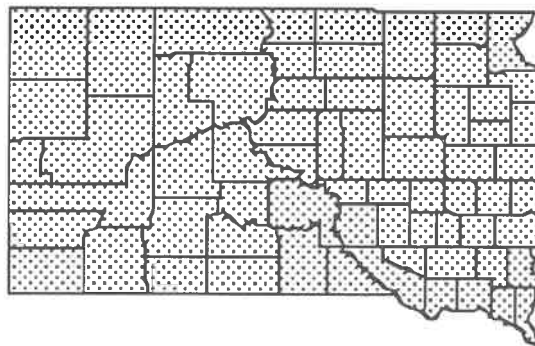
The pasque flower is a plant with many names: "prairie smoke;" "goslinweed;" "prairie crocus;" and "May flower." The scientific genus name, *Anemone*, means wind flower. The species name, *patens*, means spreading. The Lakota name for this plant, "hosi' cekpa" translates as "child's navel" and is very descriptive of the plump flower buds that look like a newborn's navel before it heals.

Pasque flowers have a showy, beautiful blossom that is composed of 5 to 7 *sepals* that look like petals. True petals are lacking. The flowers are *radially symmetrical* and grow to be 1 to 4 inches (2.5 - 10.2 cm) wide. Leaves on the stem are silky, haired, *sessile*, and arranged in a *whorl* beneath the petal-like *sepals*. The basal leaves, typical of all plants in the buttercup family, have long, hairy *petioles* and are deeply indented, producing narrow, linear *palmate* lobes. A similar



species, not found in South Dakota is the western pasque flower. It can be distinguished by its smaller flowers that are lighter in color.

Distribution



The pasque flower is found across much of North America from approximately 43 degrees to 60 degrees north latitude. It is found from Alaska, south to Utah, east to Illinois and west to Alberta.

Pasque flowers prefer plains, foothills and mountain meadows at altitudes from 4,000 to 10,000 feet (1231-3077 m). In eastern South Dakota, pasque flower growth can be quite luxuriant, though it becomes more sparse west of the Missouri River. With agriculture and ranching, pasque flowers are not as abundant as they once were, but they are still locally common in the Black Hills, Slim Buttes, and Cave Hills.

Natural History

Pasque flowers are the first sign that spring has arrived in South Dakota. These lovely blossoms peak through the snow beginning in late March. By mid-summer, their life cycle is complete.

Anemones are wind flowers; their seeds are dispersed by the wind so that new plants develop away from the parent plant. The plants develop quickly in the spring by sending out a hairy stem with a *whorl* of *bracts* and a flower bud that grows 4 to 15 inches (10-38 cm) in height. As the plant matures, a woody, persistent stem develops just beneath the soil. Each year, this stem gives rise to new growth of leaves and flowers. The flower will develop into a 1 to 2.5 inch (2.5-6.6 cm) wide fruiting head with many small fruits (*achenes*), each of which has a long feathery attachment that can catch the wind.

Significance

Perhaps the greatest significance of the pasque flower is that it was chosen by the South Dakota legislature in 1903 as the first official symbol of South Dakota.

Because it is a beautiful sign of winter's end, it has found its way into South Dakota culture. Pasque Petals is the name of South Dakota's journal of poetry. In Prairie Smoke, titled after the pasque flower, Melvin Gilmore transcribes many Native American connections to the species. Gilmore claims that the Arikara Nation would sometimes include pasque flowers in a springtime ceremony. In the ceremony a holy cedar tree was floated down the Missouri River carrying worn out baby moccasins and pasque flowers to tell down stream villages that the Arikara Nation still survived.

Pasque flowers are considered unimportant as a forage plant for domestic livestock since its early blooming and seeding allows it to complete its life cycle and be dried up by midsummer. This timing is fortunate because the species is suspected of being toxic. There have been some records of pasque flowers causing mechanical blockages in the digestive tracts of sheep. This species is more important as forage to wildlife such as turkeys, especially since little else is available so early in the spring. Honey bees and other pollen gatherers depend on pasque flowers to replenish their food stores after a long winter.

Conservation

Although laws exist in South Dakota to protect many species of animals, there are no laws protecting plant species that grow on private land. However, collecting of plants on some state and federal lands is restricted.

Glossary

Achenes - a one-seeded fruit with a thin, dry wall that does not open up automatically when ripe to discharge the seed.

Bracts - modified, reduced leaves.

Palmate - divided similarly to a palm or hand.

Petioles - stalk of a leaf.

Radially symmetrical - arranged in a circular pattern around a central axis.

Sepals - modified leaves at the base of the flower.

Sessile - without a stalk; as when leaves are directly attached to the stem.

Whorl - arranged in a circle, as leaves around a stem at a single point.

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