

NATIVE PERENNIALS

Leadplant



Amorpha canescens

Native. Compound leaves have gray leaflets covered with dense woolly hair. Beautiful purple flower spikes. Legume. Grows in pastures, rocky or sandy hills, & well-drained prairies.

Develops semi-woody crown. Deep rooted and drought tolerant. Grows 1-2 feet tall.

Description: Leadplant is a shrubby perennial that may appear like a large forb when mowed or grazed. Otherwise, older stems are woody and persistent. Normal height is 1 to 3+ feet. From June to August terminal spikes of tiny, violet flowers accented with golden-yellow anthers make leadplant a striking prairie beauty. Leaves are alternate, pinnately compound, covered with dense short hairs, and appear gray-green. Leadplant is deep-rooted, drawing most of its moisture from depths greater than 4 feet, therefore not competing excessively with associated grasses.

Distribution/Habitat: Leadplant is a native associated almost exclusively with big and little bluestem. It is distributed from southeast Montana to southwest of Ontario and western Illinois and south to north Texas and northeast New Mexico, then north through eastern Colorado and Wyoming. It is present in well managed, silty and sandy, moist rangelands across South Dakota.

Comments: Leadplant, or prairie shoestring, is an excellent forage of high nutritive quality and palatability which accounts for decreased abundance or disappearance with intensive use. Prairie birds use leadplant for nesting and protection from the elements; sharp-tailed grouse eat its seeds in the fall. American Indians used the dried leaves for smoking and for tea. Superstitions have held that leadplant is an indicator of lead ore, but the common name refers to the color of its grayish foliage. This handsome plant is sometimes cultivated as an ornamental.

Credit: James E. Johnson & Gary E. Larson, Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains. SDSU, Brookings, SD. B-566 (rev.) August 1999. Page 256.

Photo Credit: Big Sioux Nursery, Inc., Watertown, SD

