

NATIVE PERENNIALS

Prairie Smoke



Geum triflorum

Native. Delightful prairie plant with interesting flower stalks produced in May and June. Nodding reddish flowers produce feathery seed heads which look like smoke. Leaves form a basal rosette which is attractive the rest of the summer. Grows 6-12” tall.

Description: Prairie smoke is a clump-forming perennial forb from thick, black rhizomes. In May and June drooping reddish-pink flowers appear, often 3 together on each 6 to 12 inch stem. With maturity, flowers become upright with long, spreading, feathery beaks of clustered achenes fancifully resembling a puff of smoke. Leaves are mostly basal, pinnately cleft, and hairy, with the segments lobed or toothed.

Distribution/Habitat: Prairie smoke is native across southern Canada, the northern tier of states, and from South Dakota to Colorado, New Mexico, and California. It inhabits relatively moist prairies and open woodlands, often on hillsides or ridges. Prairie smoke is found across most of North Dakota, except the south-central part, and in the far eastern and western parts of South Dakota. It is absent in Nebraska.

Comments: Prairie smoke is also known as torch flower and old man's whiskers. Forage value is generally rated as poor. In South Dakota abundance is local where plants form small colonies, but it draws much attention because its flowers and fruit clusters are on display early in the season. Blackfeet boiled plants in water to wash sore or inflamed eyes. They used a root tea to treat canker sores, sore throat, coughs, open wounds, and as a general tonic. Mixed with grease into a salve, the root was used to treat sores, rashes, blisters, and flesh wounds. Roots were scraped, mixed with tobacco, and smoked to “clear the mind.” Roots are said to have been boiled to make a beverage resembling weak sassafras tea.

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 224.

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

