

## PLANTING GUIDE

*Dalea purpurea* Vent.

**Common Names:**  
purple prairie clover  
violet prairie clover

### Accession Numbers:

9068608 Zone – 1, North Iowa Germplasm  
9068609 Zone – 2, Central Iowa Germplasm  
9068610 Zone – 3, Southern Iowa Germplasm

### Description:

Purple prairie clover is a native, warm-season legume that grows to a height of 30 to 90 cm. Several stems may grow from a single base. The flowers are pinkish-purple on elongated spikes that are 2-4 cm long. The flower head at the end of a wiry stem is cylindrical, with a fringe of rosy petals on a partly bare cone. Purple prairie clover flowers the last of May through September. The leaves are divided into 3-5 narrow leaflets that may be sparingly hairy.

Purple prairie clover occurs in prairies, rocky open glades, along railroads, and rocky or open woods. It ranges from Indiana to Saskatchewan and Montana, south to Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas and New Mexico; also in Alabama and introduced east to New York. It is most abundant in the upland of the true prairie. It also occurs in sand prairies, hill prairies, and gravel-hill prairies.

**Purpose:** Purple prairie clover can be used in the following situations: roadside plantings, wildlife food and habitat, wildflower gardens because of its attractive flowers, and as a small component in a seeding mixture for prairie restoration. Tea can be made from vigorous taproot to reduce fever in measles victims. This plant is highly palatable and nutritious. It is grazed often and tends to decrease under heavy use. Purple prairie clover fixes nitrogen in the soil.

**Habitat/Range:** Purple prairie clover is found in dry to mesic prairies throughout the tall grass region.

**Source:** Seed of these collections of purple prairie clover was collected from native stands located in northern (Zone 1), central (Zone 2) and Southern (Zone 3) counties in the state of Iowa.

**Establishment (For Seed Production):** Stratify seed in cold moist conditions for 60 days, following scarification of the seed lots, and inoculate with (Innoculum – F) before planting. Prepare a clean weed free seedbed by disking and harrowing or chemical weed control. Firm the seedbed by cultipacking. Seedbed should be firm enough to allow the seed to be planted ¼ inch



deep. A seeder with a legume box works well in the seeding operation, although other types of seeders or drills may be used. Plants are largely cross-pollinated. Purple prairie clover grows best on well-drained or dry soils.

**Fertilizer:** Apply no fertilizer the establishment year unless soil test indicates a low deficiency of less than 15 PPM of phosphorus and or less than 90 PPM of potassium. Use no nitrogen during the establishment year as this can encourage weed competition.

**Seeding Rates (For Seed Production):** Seeding rates for purple prairie clover should be about two pounds of pure live seed (PLS) per acre for seed production in 36 inch rows. An average pound of purple prairie clover contains approximately 300,000 seeds.

For solid stand production, drill three times the seeding rate of row production to maintain 40 PLS per square foot.

For prairie restoration or diverse plantings for wildlife refer to NRCS Iowa – 327 Conservation Cover Standard that pertains to this species.

**Seeding Dates:** Use stratified inoculated seed for spring planting (April to June), and unstratified inoculated seed for fall dormant seedings (November to March).

**Management:** Reduce weed competition by mowing or cultivating between the rows of purple prairie clover. For grassy weed control usage of a post grass herbicide can provide weed control and will encourage a good stand. Use label recommendations for application.

**Note:** Herbicide products may not be registered on this forb species in your state. NRCS does not endorse the use of any product.

See NRCS Iowa Prescribed Burning Practice Code 338 on burning criteria. Burning may be appropriate where plant vigor declines in native plant species or where invader species threaten a native mix stand.

Source identified seed will be released to interested commercial seed growers.

A list of commercial growers can be obtained from the Elsberry Plant Materials Center or Iowa Crop Improvement Association, The Iowa Seed Directory.

4/27/00

## References

*Prairie Plants of Illinois*; pp. 226-227; Voigt, John W. and Mohlenbrock, Robert H.; Both from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Illinois.

*The Prairie Garden, 70 Native Plants You Can Grow in Town or County*; pp. 160-161, Smith, J. Robert and Smith, Beatrice S., University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin 1980.

*Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie, The Upper Midwest*, p. 243; Runkel, Sylvan T. and Roosa, Dean M., Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa 1989.

*Flora of Missouri*; p. 1498; Steyermark, Julian A., Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa 1963.

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