

Plant Emblems of Alberta



Alberta's Floral Emblem

Prickly Rose - *Rosa acicularis*

Prickly rose was designated Alberta's floral emblem in 1930. It was incorporated in the design of Alberta's coat of arms and also appears on vehicle licence plates for the province of Alberta. Botanically, prickly rose is part of the rose family (Rosaceae).

Identifying Features



Marsha Hayward

Prickly rose grows to roughly 1.5 m tall and has bristly branches with slender prickles of uneven length. Prickly rose is a deciduous shrub with 3–7 oblong leaflets on a pinnately compound leaf; the leaflet margin is toothed, and the underside is somewhat hairy. The flowers of prickly rose are 5–7 cm wide, usually with 5 petals ranging from light to dark pink in colour. The seed pod (hip) is 1–2 cm long and usually pear-shaped.

Uses and Location

Prickly rose is widespread in its distribution. It can be found on the open prairie and along riverbanks, as well as in wooded areas and on rocky slopes. It is considered a natural pioneer on disturbances, and its reclamation potential is under investigation due to the enhanced soil stabilization and erosion control function it provides.

Numerous parts of the rose shrub are edible. Petals can be added to salads, teas, jellies, and wines, and the young shoots and leaves are also edible. The rose hip is high in vitamins and remains on the shrub throughout the winter season, providing a valuable food source for foraging wildlife.

Status

Prickly rose is not considered endangered in Alberta and is not present on the Alberta Conservation Information Management System (ACIMS) tracking list.

Alberta's Tree Emblem

Lodgepole Pine - *Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia*

Lodgepole pine was adopted as the official tree emblem of Alberta on May 30, 1984, largely due to the efforts of the Junior Forest Warden Association of Alberta. Botanically, it is part of the pine family (Pinaceae), and the common name likely refers to the use of the tree by the Blackfoot and Blood tribes for tipi poles.

Identifying Features

Seed cones of lodgepole pine are egg-shaped and 2–5 cm in length. They curve backwards toward the trunk of the tree and have small spines which protrude from the top of the scale. Seed cones mature after two years and may remain on the tree for multiple seasons, often only releasing seed once fire has softened the resin that holds the scales together.



Lorne Fitch

Lodgepole pine grows in pure or mixed stands. It is generally a straight tree, reaching heights of up to 30 m. In crowded settings, the branches, which curve upwards, are generally restricted to the upper third of the tree. The lodgepole pine performs well in sandy soils and on dry sites.

Uses and Location

Found in the northern hemisphere, the lodgepole pine is common at lower elevations of the subalpine zone of the Rocky Mountains and within the boreal forest. Lodgepole pine can also be found in the Cypress Hills of southeastern Alberta.

Lodgepole pine is a major part of Alberta's forestry manufacturing industry, and its lumber is used for framing houses. Pine needle tea is high in vitamins A and C and historically was taken in winter to prevent or cure scurvy. The wood is considered an excellent fuel source, and the resin is an outstanding product for waterproofing canoes and other items.

Status

Lodgepole pine is not considered endangered in Alberta and is not present on the ACIMS tracking list.

► For more information

Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum:

Rough Fescue Backgrounder - http://www.albertapcf.org/rsu_docs/rough-fescue-backgrounder.pdf

Common Plants of the Western Rangelands:

Volume 2, Trees and Shrubs by Kathy Tannas, 2003, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Olds College and Kathy Tannas, Edmonton, AB.

Edible and Medicinal Plants of Canada by A. MacKinnon, L. Kershaw, J. T. Arnason, P. Owen, A. Karst and F. Hamersley-Chambers, 2009, Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, AB.

Trees and Shrubs of Alberta by Kathleen Wilkinson, 1990, Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, AB.

by Anita Carswell. Anita is an environmental professional who enjoys spending time with her family and exploring the wild country of Alberta.



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Alberta's Grass Emblem

Rough Fescue - *Festuca* species

Rough fescue was designated the provincial grass emblem on April 30, 2003, due to the efforts of the Prairie Conservation Forum. Alberta recognizes three species of rough fescue: northern rough fescue (*F. altaica*), mountain rough fescue (*F. campestris*), and plains rough fescue (*F. hallii*). They are symbolic of Alberta's natural diversity from plains to foothills to mountains. Rough fescue is botanically in the grass family (Poaceae).

Identifying Features

Rough fescues are perennial bunchgrasses and grow in dense tufts. They all have fibrous root systems with *Festuca hallii* also being rhizomatous. All rough fescues have a panicle head with several spikelets, and all have open sheaths.

Northern rough fescue — *Festuca altaica*

A yellowish to dark green plant, the grass stems (culms) are 30–60 cm tall. The sheaths are hairless (glabrous) and rough (scabrous), and the leaf blade is 1–2.5 mm wide and covered with fine hairs (pubescent). The flower head (panicle) is 8–15 cm long and open to somewhat contracted. It is usually light green, often with purple colouring.

Mountain rough fescue — *Festuca campestris*

A grey green to bluish plant, the culms are 40–120 cm tall. The sheaths and culms are glabrous and shiny (lustrous), and the leaf blade is 2–4 mm wide with sparse pubescence. The panicle is 10–20 cm long and open to somewhat contracted. It may have subtle purple colouring.

Plains rough fescue — *Festuca hallii*

The culms are 20–60 cm tall and glabrous. The sheaths are glabrous and lustrous and often have a tint of purple. The leaf blade is 1–1.5 mm wide with sparse pubescence. The panicle is 6–15 cm long and open to somewhat contracted. It may have subtle purple colouring.



Cheryl Bradley

Uses and Location

Mountain rough fescue is found in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta and on high plateaus in the prairies, where it overlaps with plains rough fescue. Plains rough fescue grasslands were once common in central Alberta prairies and parklands, but they have been largely replaced by cultivation and settlement. Northern rough fescue occurs in the subalpine of the Rocky Mountains of west-central Alberta.

Rough fescue offers excellent forage value for wildlife and livestock during spring and over the winter season, and it provides great value to the ranching community. Natural grasslands, where rough fescues play an important role in ecological diversity, are also considered a natural carbon sink, storing about 34% of the global terrestrial stock of carbon.

Status

Rough fescues are a symbol of Alberta's prairie heritage and show the need for conservation of biodiversity of native grasslands. Neither plains rough fescue nor mountain rough fescue is present on the ACIMS tracking list. However, ACIMS does track northern rough fescue (S2 rank) and communities dominated by plains rough fescue (S1 or S2 rank).

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