



Native Plant News

Vol. 15, No. 4

Winter 2010

Weird plants

Native flowers can have a real wild side

By CHET NEUFELD
NPSS Executive Director

It's no secret that I love native plants, and while they are all nice in their own way, the ones I really like are the unusual ones.

Most often, they have unusual adaptations such as being able to trap and digest insects as our native sundews and pitcher plants do, or possessing ornate flowers like our native orchids do.

But sometimes even common, "ordinary looking" native plants get a weird streak in them. Whether it's genetically induced or the result of a fungus, local conditions or something totally unexplainable, sometimes nice plants do weird things.

For some reason or another, 2010 was a very good year to find weird plants. Not only did I find some of my own, but I also had many photos of weird plants sent to me.

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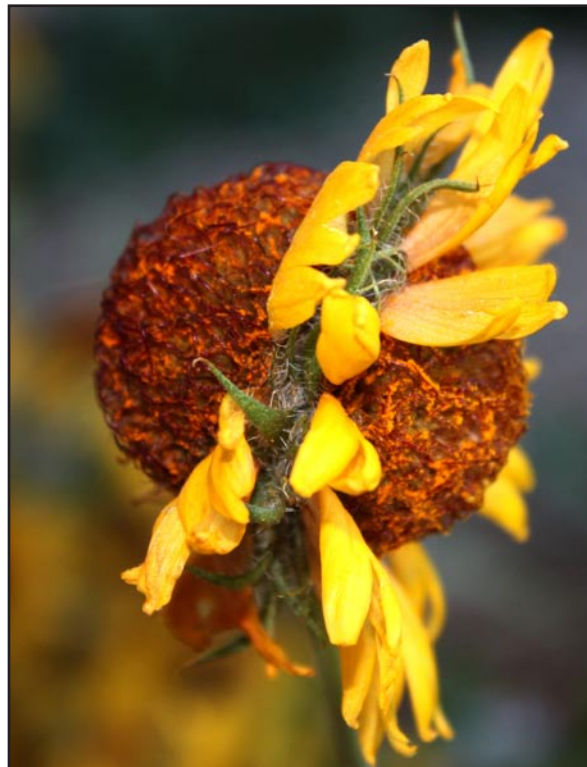


PHOTO BY CHET NEUFELD

A double-bloomed gaillardia (*Gaillardia aristata*) with the blossoms facing back to back.



PHOTOS BY BOB GODWIN (LEFT) AND PAUL PANTON (RIGHT)

(Above left) Pink western spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*). (Above right) Pale yellow spotted western red lily (*Lilium philadelphicum* var. *andinum*).

Celebrating forests at NPSS AGM

Join the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan in celebrating its 16th year by attending our annual general meeting on Feb. 11 and 12 at Saskatoon's TCU Place.

The AGM gives people a chance to learn about native plants and habitats, meet like-minded people and have some fun! This year, we're also celebrating 2011 as the International Year of Forests by focusing on the northern half of our province, an often-overlooked but vitally important area both for our environmental, economic and social well-being.

This year there's an added bonus as we will be screening the winners from the United Nations International Forest Film Festival.

Submissions came in from around the globe from many well-known filmmakers and were judged by a panel of experts. The winners will be shown at the premiere at the UN headquarters in New York in February, after which they will be sent to us. We are the only venue in Saskatchewan for this prestigious event. Secure your spot at the screening by registering early as the

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7 Is imitating native prairie the way to go?

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Native Plant News is a quarterly publication of the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan (NPSS) and is one of the benefits of membership. Members are invited to submit articles, news, views, photographs and comments. Views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the NPSS.

Deadlines:**Submission****Publication**

Winter Issue: November 1 December 15

Spring Issue: February 1 March 15

Summer Issue: May 1 June 15

Fall Issue: August 1 September 15

Membership Dues (Year End November 30th)

Individual \$30

Family \$45

Student/Low Income \$15

Corporate \$200

Life \$500

Please contact the NPSS office for information about the lifetime membership instalment payment option.

The nursery needs your help

By TARA SAMPLE
NPSS President

Several years ago I was invited to a buffalo stomp as part of a small native grassland restoration project at an elementary school in Regina. It was a chilly afternoon, but you wouldn't have known that from the expressions on the faces of the students. They were far too caught up in the excitement of playing the role that bison did long ago. For many, this was likely their first genuine connection with the plant life native to the place they call home.

It was a beautiful thing to witness and something that has happened many times since thanks to seeds collected from the Regina Plain Native Prairie Seed Nursery.

I think a lot about that day as I contemplate the future of the nursery.

Like many conservation initiatives, the upkeep of the nursery is largely dependent on the interest and commitment of those who volunteer to help and those who fund its existence. Resources like the nursery require a lot of work and money to operate, and in recent years it has fallen into disrepair because of shortfalls of each.

Last summer a group of dedicated volunteers worked hard to start bringing the nursery back to its former condition. Weeding, as many know, is a thankless job at the best of times – even in your own backyard – but these wonderful people cheerfully gave up their free time to do it.

Thank you for your dedication, sacrifice and support! After the dust settled at the final clean up this fall, I was amazed at how much had been accomplished.

However, there is still a great deal to be done and sadly resources are tighter than ever.

We enter 2011 facing the reality that no summer student or paid help will be available to spend a few hours a week taking care of the nursery as we've had in the past. This could jeopardize the progress we've made so far, which would be a shame.

If you know of any business or organization that might have an interest in the nursery or be able to provide this type of in-kind support, please let us know or have them contact us.

And please, if you have time to spare, I urge you to come out to a weeding bee this summer. And if you know someone that might like to help, bring them along. Spread the word, non-members are always welcome.

Alternatively, consider donating to the nursery yourself. A little goes a long way. Or if you know of a business, organization or other entity who has an interest in this kind of project, have them contact Chet Neufeld to discuss sponsorship or other donation options.

Let's hope we can keep the progress we're making with the Regina Plain Native Prairie Seed Nursery going so future generations of children too might find that connection to the prairie I witnessed. ❁

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Grow your business, plant the seeds of success here.

Rare Plant Rescue: Notes from the field



PHOTO BY MELISSA RANALLI

Rare Plant Rescue Field Crew on a survey during the summer.

By *MELISSA RANALLI*
Rare Plant Rescue Coordinator,
Nature Saskatchewan

Considering the challenges created by Saskatchewan's rainy spring and summer, Rare Plant Rescue (RPR) had a very successful 2010 field season.

The excessive amount of rain delayed our work schedule slightly, however, the search and monitoring crews still found a considerable number of rare plants. With our stewards' participation, RPR was able to search for rare plant occurrences in Burstall, Caron, the Eyebrow Plain, the Coteau Hills, the Estevan area and the Elbow and Dundurn sand hills. The monitoring crew also found rare plants on some of the sites we monitored this year, bringing the total number of new rare plant occurrences to 128 for 2010!

While all the rain was a curse to many, slender mouse-ear-cress (*Transberingia bursifolia ssp. virgata*) is one species that seems to have benefited from this year's moist conditions.

Compared to 2009, slender mouse-ear-cress had a considerably better showing in 2010. One of our most surprising discoveries this summer was a new slender mouse-ear-cress population found north of Moose Jaw during the RPR search crew's training. This was quite a find since slender mouse-ear-cress had not previously been found east of Riverhurst. The world of rare plants is full of excitement!

One interesting site along the South Saskatchewan River that RPR was monitoring this year supported a large population of small-flowered sand-verbena (*Tripterocalyx micranthus*) that was found in 2009. By revisiting this site several times, we found that while hundreds of

seedlings were present in early June, by late June high water levels had flooded the low-lying plants along the shore and sand movement had covered a portion of the individuals growing higher on the banks.

Little is known about the biology of small-flowered sand-verbena so the effect of this type of event on populations is not known.

While conducting monitoring work at the river site, we also came across smooth goosefoot (*Chenopodium subglabrum*), a threatened species, and a collection of small-flowered sand-verbena fruits. The latter was a particularly fortunate, incidental discovery since these fruits are easily picked up and blown by the wind or covered by blowing sand.

The RPR search crew was once again pleasantly surprised by a find while searching for western spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*) in Douglas Provincial Park in July. The crew found a western spiderwort plant with four petals instead of the typical three, and individuals with pink flowers instead of the common purple colour (see "Weird plants" on the cover of this issue).

In the Estevan area, the buffalograss (*Buchloë dactyloides*) search activities were just as successful as the rest of this summer's work. The search crew found buffalograss on nearly every quarter section of land searched! The crew was fortunate to see horses on several parcels of land, including one pair grazing on a patch of buffalograss – living proof that buffalograss thrives with grazing.

If you would like to know more about RPR, or have any comments or questions regarding the RPR program, please feel free to contact me any time at (306) 780-9417 or by emailing rpr@naturesask.ca. 🌱

Upcoming Events

January 2011

Native Prairie Speaker Series

Wednesday, Jan. 19

Royal Saskatchewan Museum
Auditorium

Regina, Sask.

Technical: 12:15 to 12:50 p.m.

Dr. Paul James: *Ecological Goods and Services*.

Public: 7 to 8 p.m.

Dr. Howard Wheater: *Water Sustainability*.

www.pcap-sk.org

February 2011

Native Prairie Restoration and Reclamation Workshop

Feb. 16 and 17

Conexus Arts Centre,
Jacqui Shumiatcher Room

Regina, Sask.

Presented by the Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan. Registration closes Feb. 9. Call 306-352-0472 for more details.

www.pcap-sk.org

Native Prairie Speaker Series

Wednesday, Feb. 23

University of Saskatchewan,
Agriculture Building Rm. 2E17
Saskatoon, Sask.

Technical: 12:15 to 12:50 p.m.

Renny Grilz: *Status of Conservation Easements in Saskatchewan and Alberta*.

Public: 7 to 8 p.m.

Chet Neufeld: *Invasive Plant Issues in Urban Areas*.

www.pcap-sk.org

March 2011

CLRA Alberta Chapter 2011 AGM and Conference: Chasing the Bar

March 2 to 4

Capri Hotel and Conference Centre
Red Deer, Alta.

Conference will explore the meaning of Chasing the Bar as it reflects on the reclamation industry.

Registration deadline is Feb. 1. For more, call 403-289-9435.

www.clra.ca

www.CapriCentre.com

To submit your native plant related event to our events list, send your information (including date, contact, phone number and location) to info@npss.sk.ca.

Nature can have a weird streak

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Many of the photos I received this year are of Saskatchewan's provincial flower, the western red lily (*Lilium philadelphicum* var. *andinum*). If any of you have read *Prairie Phoenix* by Anna Leighton and Bonnie Lawrence, you'll know that the western red lily is highly variable in its appearance. It can range in colour from deep red to bright yellow, have varying amounts of spots in the throat of the flower, and possess different amounts and shapes of petals (technically called tepals when dealing with the western red lily, but that's another story).

While the western red lily has its share of oddities, there are many other native plants out there that also tend to go awry from time to time.

Western spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*), a threatened plant listed in the *Species at Risk Act*, is another plant that can sometimes show some variation. While conducting rare plant surveys on a population of western spiderwort, I stumbled on a pink-flowered specimen. Typically the flowers are a deep blue-purple, but this one had bright pink blossoms. Others have found similar specimens (see front cover) in the same area, although it is uncertain whether or not it was the same plant.

In another location, a plant was found that was the right colour but had four petals instead of the normal three (see photos on the right). It also had an extra stamen (they usually only have six).

Also this summer, I found a sunflower (*Helianthus* spp.) in the sand dunes of the Dundurn AESB pasture during



PHOTO BY CHET NEUFELD

These sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.) were found near Dundurn, Sask. The flower on the right has roughly half the number of petals and is lighter in colour, while the flower on the left is normal. Interestingly, both flowers were growing on the same plant!



PHOTO BY BOB GODWIN

This is a typical western spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*) specimen.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER RUMANCIK

This specimen of western spiderwort has an extra petal and stamen.

the NPSS Rare Plant Survey Techniques Course. The flower on the right (top of page) has roughly half the number of petals and is lighter in colour, while the flower on the left is the "normal" specimen. Interestingly, both of these flowers were growing on the same plant!

Some species of flowering plants that more commonly have a colourful flower also have an uncommon, white-flowered form. While at the Maurice Street Nature Sanctuary near Nipawin,

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PHOTOS BY PAUL PANTON

This lily has the typical colouring, but is missing the spots on the inner part of the tepal.



PHOTO BY CANDACE NEUFELD

This is a normal specimen of the western red lily (*Lilium philadelphicum* var. *andinum*) – including six tepals, the right orange colouring and the typical spotting.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATURE SASKATCHEWAN

This specimen also has the typical colouring and spots, but sports two extra tepals and two extra stamens.

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I stumbled across a white form of early blue violet (*Viola adunca* var. *adunca*), which, as its name suggests, is typically blue to purple (below).

Another native plant that can have white flowers is blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium montanum*). Again, as its name suggests, it normally has blue to purple-coloured flowers. Occasionally though, I'll find a washed-out or even white-flowered blue-eyed grass. In fact, this year I found a white-flowered blue-eyed grass growing in my lawn. I only have the typical blue-eyed grass planted in my yard, so it will be interesting to see what happens next year.

Another wildflower that can have odd flowers is gaillardia (*Gaillardia aristata*). While I've never seen a variation in flower colour, I've seen many different types of flowering heads. The photo on the cover shows a double-bloomed gaillardia, with the blossoms facing back to back. What a way to increase your chances of pollination! I wonder if the seeds will be viable and, if so, whether they will produce a double-bloom plant. It seems very unlikely, but this is typically how new species start, so you never know.

Another native flower that has shown high variation is black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*). I've seen specimens that have unusually large flowers (up to 5 times the size) that are contorted into various shapes, some curling back on themselves to form a ring. The stems on these are also typically deformed, having wide, ribbon-like stems (only 2 to 3 mm thick but up to 5 cm wide).

While on the NPSS annual summer field tour in the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park in July, participants found the above mountain lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium*



PHOTO BY DAVID FREEMAN

A mountain lady's slipper (*Cypripedium montanum*) in Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park was found with part of the slipper formed into a sepal.

dium montanum). Sometime during the formation of its flower, the slipper part of the flower and one of the sepals remained

joined, preventing the slipper from fully forming. However, it appears that not only did the sepal form (the green wavy edge on the white slipper), but another fully formed sepal grew in its place, perhaps triggered to grow by the failure to split.

As you can see, native plants truly can do weird and wonderful things. Keep your eyes open and you too might find one of these natural wonders.

If you've found an odd-looking flower, tell us about it. If you have a photo, even better! We can post the photos on our Facebook page and even run another article on them if we get enough submissions.

To submit your sightings and stories, contact Chet at info@npss.sk.ca or call (306) 668-3940. 🌱



This white form of early blue violet (*Viola adunca* var. *adunca*) was found at the Maurice Street Nature Sanctuary near Nipawin. As its name suggests, is typically blue to purple in colour, not white.

PHOTO BY
CHET NEUFELD

Important forest conservation agreement signed

Earlier this year, 21 companies of the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC), and nine leading environmental organizations, unveiled an unprecedented agreement – the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement. The agreement applies to 72 million hectares of public forests licensed to FPAC members.

The agreement, when fully implemented, will conserve significant areas of Canada's vast boreal forest, protect threatened woodland caribou and provide a competitive market edge for participating companies.

Under the Agreement FPAC members, who manage two-thirds of all certified forest land in Canada, commit to the highest environmental standards of forest management within an area twice the size of Germany. Conservation groups commit to global recognition and support for FPAC member efforts. The agreement calls for the suspension of new logging on nearly 29 million hectares of boreal forest to develop conservation plans for endangered caribou, while maintaining essential fibre supplies for uninterrupted mill operations.

The agreement identifies explicit commitments for both sides and sets out a plan, which includes:

- The development and implementation of world-leading forest management and harvesting practices;
- The completion of joint proposals for networks of protected areas and the recovery of species at risk, including woodland caribou;
- A full life cycle approach to forest carbon management; and
- Support for the economic future of forest communities and for the recognition of conservation achievements in the global marketplace.

Signatories have begun meetings with provincial governments, First Nations and communities across the country to seek their leadership and full participation in advancing the goals of the agreement.

Go to the www.canadianborealforestagreement.com to read the full press release.*

AGM to feature forest films

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public will also be invited to attend.

In addition to the International Forest Film Festival, we have an all-star lineup of speakers who will discuss many important and interesting forest-related topics. Please read the AGM agenda (attached separately) for a timeline of events and presentations. You'll

notice that due to the popularity of our workshop component last year, we have decided to hold another workshop. The topic this year is "Techniques for Creating Backyard Habitat."

Ready to register? Fill out the attached registration form or visit the NPSS website (www.npss.sk.ca) to print out the full agenda and registration.*

16th annual NPSS AGM speakers

Keynote address: Nature Quest – Saskatchewan's Boreal Forest

John Murray will take the audience on a journey through our boreal forest and discuss important facts, such as: the world's forests are disappearing; Saskatchewan's boreal forest presents a large and healthy habitat of wildlife but its long-term health is at risk; large, linked protected areas are a key aspect of maintaining wildlife habitat; and that the public has a role to play in supporting conservation initiatives. In addition, John will show examples of some of the education initiatives carried out in classrooms and in the forest by the Nature Quest team.

John Murray is a Silviculture consultant with over 30 years of experience in various capacities within the forestry industry in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Eco-buffers

An alternative planting design, termed an Ecological buffer (Eco-buffer) is being evaluated and demonstrated for its ability to be successfully integrated into current farming systems, while providing desired economic and ecological goals. Eco-buffers are described as a new shelterbelt design that incorporates a variety of native trees and shrubs in a narrow, dense configuration that captures the site quickly, reducing the need for long-term weed control. This presentation, by Janna Lutz – an Agroforestry Specialist with the Agroforestry Development Centre (formerly Shelterbelt Centre), Agriculture and Agri-food Canada –

will focus on the history, research, design considerations and benefits of Eco-buffers, with examples of current demonstration projects.

Endemic Vascular Plant Species in the Athabasca Sand Dunes of Northern Saskatchewan

The Athabasca Sand Dunes of northern Saskatchewan form a dynamic landscape, housing 10 endemic plant species, each possessing unique traits allowing for survival amongst their habitat. Occupancy surveys were conducted for these endemic vascular plant species in Athabasca Sand Dunes Wilderness Provincial Park during the summers of 2009 and 2010. The objective of this survey was to document the distribution and abundance of the endemic vascular flora of the Athabasca Sand Dunes. The presentation by Digit Guedo will be an overview of the study area and endemic species, as well as field operations including a discussion of the range of areas surveyed, habitat classification and sampling methods.

Guedo is a graduate student in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan.

Restoration and Maintenance of Fescue Grasslands in Prince Albert National Park

Jeff Weir, the Prince Albert National Park Fire/Vegetation Specialist, will talk about key issues that threaten the long term maintenance of fescue grasslands in Prince Albert National Park. He will describe how the park plans to address these issues and will provide real examples of activities that are currently underway.

A Sensitive Slope: Forest Recovery After Fire in a Changing Climate

Forests are composed of long-lived plants capable of tolerating high levels of environmental stress. As a result, forests may show a lot of inertia in responding to changing environmental conditions, such as those brought on by recent climate change. Instead of gradual change, resilience theory predicts that we should see punctuated changes in forest communities that are triggered by disturbance. In this talk, Dr. Jill Johnstone will present results from a recent fire near Whitehorse, Yukon (the 1998 Fox Lake fire) and examine patterns of forest recovery in light of resilience theory. Dr. Johnstone is an assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

Field Guide to the Ecosites of Saskatchewan's Provincial Forests

The ecosystems of Saskatchewan's provincial forests have recently been classified and described in a field guide that covers the province's four ecozones: Taiga Shield, Boreal Shield, Boreal Plain, and Prairie. The ecosystems are represented at the site level with 81 ecosites. Each ecosite is described on a fact sheet that provides a summary of the site attributes including characteristic vegetation, species richness, soil conditions, and much more. The classification is the result of almost 10 years of field surveys and scientific analysis. The presentation will be provided by Michael McLaughlan, R.P.F., a registered professional forester and a forest ecologist with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment.

Native prairie – worth imitating?

A look into native vs. introduced grass species

By MICHAEL SCHELLENBERG
SPARC Research Scientist

If you were to imitate native prairie, what elements would you need for successfully-functioning grassland?

First, when you think of native prairie, two things immediately jump to mind: grass and biodiversity. With regards to grass, the first issue is which grasses do you use?

Within agricultural systems, individuals have argued introduced species are more productive but more recent thinking is questioning this assumption. Many of the comparisons have been made between newly-seeded introduced species and undisturbed prairie, which is not a true comparison.

In order to be a true comparison, access to resources should be the same. But in this case, for example, the soil environment is not equal. New seedlings (typically introduced species) are usually established on recently disturbed soils with limited competition in the root zone that allows the seedlings free access to resources such as nitrogen and water. Well established undisturbed native prairie, however, often has limited nitrogen and water due to the fact root systems of established plants have fully explored the soil and captured much of the free resources.

The second item is the number of species.

When people consider seeding plants, be they for annual crop production, lawns or forage, they tend to seed a single plant species. The question is whether this is appropriate or just the simplest choice?

Experts have argued the benefits of multiple species for increased production. Also, an increased number of plant species will provide a larger number of



PHOTO BY MICHAEL SCHELLENBERG

These long-term multi-species native grass test plots at the semi-arid Prairie Agriculture Research Centre in Swift Current will give researchers insight into the nuances of prairie dynamics.

forage choices for the foraging animal to meet its nutritional needs.

In fact, if the combination is correct you could get both good production and nutrition. Grass/legume combinations have been shown to provide both an increase in plant material as well as increasing nutritive quality at some point during the growing season. At the Semiarid Prairie Agricultural Research Centre (SPARC) we have shown by combining a native forage shrub with a legume that you get an increase in plant material equal or greater than when grown alone.

But is there an advantage to having combinations of species of the same plant type (ie. grasses or legumes or shrubs)?

One would expect there to be an advantage to a mixture of plant species if they rooted at different depths, and matured at different rates. The plants within these mixtures would potentially access resources, like water, differently and potentially decrease the fight for the resource between the plant species.

In 2001 at SPARC we set out to see if this is what would happen. Native and introduced grass species were seeded in mixtures of introduced or native grasses and as single species. The species used were crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron*

cristatum), Russian wildrye (*Psathyrostachys junceus*), green needle grass (*Nasella viridula*), western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*) and switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*).

After 4 years of growth and data collection we noted a couple things.

The first was that native species, over the four year period, produced statistically the same biomass as the introduced species. This is contrary to popular thought. Secondly, the mixture produced significantly more plant material than single species.

These grass species differ in maturity rates and root depth. Additional work by a graduate student has determined different micro-organism communities associated with grasses which differ according to depth and over time.

So, there is a benefit to having differing species of the same plant grouping; in this example, grasses seeded as mixtures instead of as single species. Also in this case, the simpler seeding mix did not provide an advantage for plant material production. Benefits of diversifying plant species within a plant type and with additional plant types such as legumes or shrubs can be realized. Ongoing work at SPARC is identifying characteristics of native prairie worth imitating. 🌱

Did you know?

The National Seed Herbarium has found a home in Saskatoon



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SEED HERBARIUM

An example of one of the many specimens in the collection.

The National Seed Herbarium is a well-organized, comprehensive collection with representative seeds from around the globe. And it now resides in Saskatoon.

On Jan. 17, 2008, the completion of the move of the National Seed Herbarium (NSH) from Ottawa to its new home at the Seed Science and Technology Section (SSTS) of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) Saskatoon laboratory was celebrated.

The NSH is the largest seed taxonomic herbarium in Canada and an essential resource for Canadian seed analysts, plant health inspectors and even archaeologists to confirm plant species by seed identifications. Herbarium specimens are used to compare to unknown seeds and to represent a verification standard.

The task of managing the NSH, its holdings and new accessions, is now in the hands of the NSH curator, Dr. Ruojing Wang, and the herbarium technologist, Jennifer Neudorf.

The National Seed Herbarium is believed to have started in the early 1920's as a part of the Federal Department of Agriculture, but the exact date is not known. Seed specimens have been added steadily over the years. Many of the new specimens have come from large botanical gardens with Berlin, Germany being a major source.

The current holdings of the Herbarium are approximately 20,000 specimens of 14,000 unique species, representing 239 families and 3,279 genera. The oldest specimen is an 1869 sample of Larkspur seed (*Delphinium bicolor*) received in 1905 from Utah.

The CFIA, Saskatoon laboratory, is excited to be the caretaker of this important Canadian resource, and looks forward to enhancing the collection and increasing the knowledge of seed morphology and biology to better meet the regulatory needs for seeds and pest plant species. To learn more about the NSH, email SSTS@inspection.gc.ca.*

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