

# The PLANTS Web Site: Understanding Its Basic Functionality

<<http://plants.usda.gov>>

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**NOTE:** The PLANTS Web site is currently evolving and contains mostly updated pages, such as the Home Page, but also contains pages that are still in the older design. The older designed pages will be replaced as they are completed.

**A. Searching for a Plant Name:** This can be done through three primary avenues: 1) [PLANTS Name Search](#), 2) [State Search](#), and 3) [Advanced Search](#). These are accessible from the PLANTS Home Page in the left navigation box at the top Search area.

### 1) PLANTS Name Search

The “[PLANTS Name Search](#)” is located on the PLANTS Home Page, at the top of the left hand navigation box. Note that you have to select the entity ([Scientific Name](#), [Common Name](#), or [Symbol](#)) for which you are searching from the “drop-down” box to inform the database about what you are inputting. This is a “String search,” and will return anything that matches in the field (ex. inputting *Cryptantha* as a Scientific Name will bring back all of the species in the genus *Cryptantha*, plus the species *Phacelia cryptantha* and *Castilleja cryptantha*).



Once you have a returned list, you can search through the list for the name for which you are looking, then click on the “hot” scientific name to bring back that plant’s Plant Profile.

### Common Names

Currently in PLANTS, each plant species is designated by only 1 common name.

Search for	Returns
Western wheatgrass	Plant Profile for <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>
Western wheat grass	No data found, because is isn’t spelled the same as the name in the database; try

bluejoint	searching on “western” or “wheat.”
wheatgrass	List of <i>Calamagrostis</i> species
	List of common names that contain “wheatgrass”.

## Scientific Names

Search for	Returns
Pascopyrum smithii	Plant Profile for <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>
Pascoyprum	List of current names and synonyms that contain “ <i>Pascopyrum</i> ”
Elymus	List of current names and synonyms that contain “ <i>Elymus</i> ”
Elymus elymoides	List of current names and synonyms that contain “ <i>Elymus elymoides</i> ”
Elymum elymoides ssp. elymoides	Plant Profile for <i>Elymum elymoides</i> ssp. <i>elymoides</i>

## Symbols

Each Latin binomial and trinomial is assigned a unique symbol. The symbol for a binomial consists of the first two letters of the genus, plus the first two letters of the specific epithet. For example the symbol for *Pascopyrum smithii* is PASM. Duplicates of 4 letter symbols are differentiated by adding a number as tie-breaking suffix. For example the symbol for *Elymus elymoides* is not ELEL but ELEL5. The symbol for a trinomial consists of the first two letters of the genus, plus the first two letters of the specific epithet, plus the first letter of the subspecific or varietal epithet. For example the symbol for *Elymus elymoides* ssp. *elymoides* is ELELE. Tie-breaking numbers are used here for differentiating duplicative letter combinations.

Search for	Returns
PASM	List of symbols including symbols of synonyms that contain PASM
ELEL	List of symbols including symbols of synonyms that contain ELEL
ELEL5	Plant Profile for <i>Elymus elymoides</i>

If you are unsure about the spelling of a scientific name or you desire a fast input for a return list, a symbol or the alpha portion of the symbol can be helpful.

## Synonyms

A search for the Scientific Name, *Agropyron smithii*, which is a synonym of *Pascopyrum smithii*, returns the Plant Profile for *Pascopyrum smithii*.

## 2) State Search

Users can access the exact search by clicking [State Search](#) on the Home Page. You can search on [Scientific Name](#), [Common Name](#), [Symbol](#), [Family](#), and [Genus](#). You can also filter this search by selecting one or more states/provinces, if desired. The output can also be sorted by [Scientific Name](#), [Common Name](#), or [Symbol](#). The [Scientific Name](#) is default.

This is not a “string search.” It searches for an exact match in the field that you select. If you search the Scientific Name for *Cryptantha*, the system will return the Plant Profile for the genus *Cryptantha*. If you search for the Genus *Elymus*, the system will return all of the names (including synonyms and their respective accepted names) containing the genus *Elymus*.

## Common names

Search for	Returns
western wheatgrass	Plant Profile for <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>
wheatgrass	List of species with common name wheatgrass.
*wheatgrass	List of species with multiple characters to the left of wheatgrass.
*wheatgrass*	List of species with multiple characters to the left and to the right of wheatgrass.

\* The asterisk is a wild card that instructs PLANTS to include multiple characters.

## Scientific name

A search for *Pascopyrum smithii* returns the Plant Profile for *Pascopyrum smithii*.

If you are working from a source which has a one or two letter misspelling, such as *Pascopyrun smithii*, when you enter it, PLANTS will return **No Data Found**. You might try <Pascopy\*>, which will return a list of species which have multiple characters to the right of <Pascopy>, which includes *Pascopyrum smithii*. Also, you could search using the symbol.

The screenshot shows the PLANTS database search interface. The 'State Search' section is highlighted in green. It includes a search bar for 'Scientific Name' and a 'Go' button. Below the search bar, there are options for 'State Search', 'Advanced Search', and 'Search Tool'. The 'PLANTS Topics' section lists various categories like 'Alternative Crops', 'Characteristics', 'Classification', etc. The 'Image Gallery' section shows '30,000+ Plant Images'. The 'Download' section lists 'Complete PLANTS Checklist', 'State PLANTS Checklist', etc. The 'Related Tools' section lists 'Crop Nutrient Tool', 'Ecological Site Information System', etc. The 'State Search' section is titled 'State Search' and includes a search bar for 'Scientific Name' and a 'Go' button. Below the search bar, there are options for '1. Enter Search Criteria:' and '2. Filter by Geography:'. The '1. Enter Search Criteria:' section includes a search bar and a 'Go' button. The '2. Filter by Geography:' section includes a list of states with checkboxes for filtering results by geography. The '3. Sort by:' section includes radio buttons for 'Scientific Name', 'Common Name', and 'Symbol'.

## Symbol

A search for PASM returns the Plant Profile for *Pascopyrum smithii*, since PASM is an exact match.

Within the State Search, if you use TRDA to search for *Tripsacum dactyloides*, it returns *Trichomanes davallioides*, since it is a direct match. You may want to use the **PLANTS name search** or search for TRDA\*, and *Tripsacum dactyloides* will be included in the returned list.

## State

Returns a list of all plants from genus downward that have been reported to occur in the selected state. These lists include synonyms. If you want a list without synonyms, please use the Advanced Search.

### 3) Advanced Search

**Caution:** The main thing to remember is that you have the option to either display output to the screen or click on the link to bring up the Advanced Search screen that downloads only and doesn't display the results to the screen. Browsers cannot currently handle the large and complex data sets that the Advanced Search is capable of generating. If you are doing anything except the simplest query, it is recommended that you click directly on the [Search the PLANTS database and download the results without display](#) link toward the top of the Advanced Query main page. The download portion of the Advanced Search is also available in the Download section of the left navigation bar.



Users can filter plant species by the boundaries of any attribute or any combination of attributes in the PLANTS database, and then download this information to in an ASCII delimited file.

### Examples:

- Plant species that occur in Arizona and are Graminoids (Grasses).
- Plant species that occur in Wyoming, are shrubs, will grow with 14 inches or less precipitation, and with a soil pH of 7.5 or greater.
- Plants species that occur in Arizona and have Plant Guides.

There are two classes of attributes with which you can filter:

#### Part A: PLANTS Core Data

Basic attributes that are defined for all plant species in the PLANTS database.

#### Part B: Characteristics Data

Attributes that are defined for only 2500+ important conservation plant species. If you select plants by any of attributes in Part B, you will limit your plant selection to the 2500 conservation plants.

**Examples:** Select and download the Arizona noxious weed list.

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#### Using Netscape

Set attribute **State Noxious Status = Arizona**  
Check **Display in Report**  
Click **Display Report Now**  
Click **Download This Information** (at

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#### Using Explorer

Set attribute **State Noxious Status = Arizona**  
Check **Display in Report**  
Click **Display Report Now**  
Click **Download This Information** (at

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bottom of web page)  
Click **File / Save As**

bottom of web page)  
**Right click / Save Target As...**

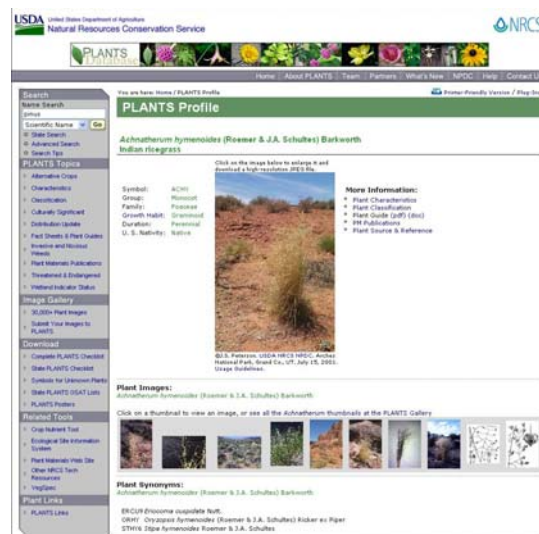
Excerpts from [About the Advanced Search and Download](#) on the PLANTS Web site-  
Advanced Search main page.

- You must display a field if you want to be able to sort on it.
- Requests for too much information will tax our server, be slow to appear, and may overwhelm your browser. In the latter event, try downloading the information without displaying it first. This option is available from the second link on the Advanced Search main page.
- You can select more than one value within a field by using the Control Key
- "Any" in the search means that any values will be reported in the results; it is equivalent to "all".

## B. Plant Profile

**General:** The Plant Profile is the primary access point for information on a particular plant. There is a Plant Profile for every taxon in PLANTS. Some plants have more information than other, but all have a profile. All information for a taxon is available from that profile. When you click on most "hot" names produced in various lists within PLANTS, you will go directly to the Plant Profile for that taxon. Other products, such as Plant Guides will be accessible from that profile.

Example: Inputting the symbol ACHY for *Achnatherum hymenoides* (Indian ricegrass) or HYCA for *Hydrastis canadensis* (goldenseal) returns a list of plants with symbols containing the input characters. Click on the target name and bring up the Plant Profile. You can also just click on the Plant of the Week on the Home Page to view a Plant Profile.



The Plant Profile is designed to provide the user with access to information pertaining to that taxon.

**Plant Profile:** The topmost area (shown here) provides you with some basic attributes about the taxon, plus an image, if one is available on PLANTS.

Note that the attribute **Growth Habit** is hot and you can click this to bring up a window containing definitions.

To the right, under "More Information," you may find links to Plant Guides, Plant Characteristics, Fact Sheets, References, and other information that may be available.

Note also that in the upper right corner of this area (just above the green Plant Profile bar), you have access to a **Printer-Friendly Version** of the Plant Profile.

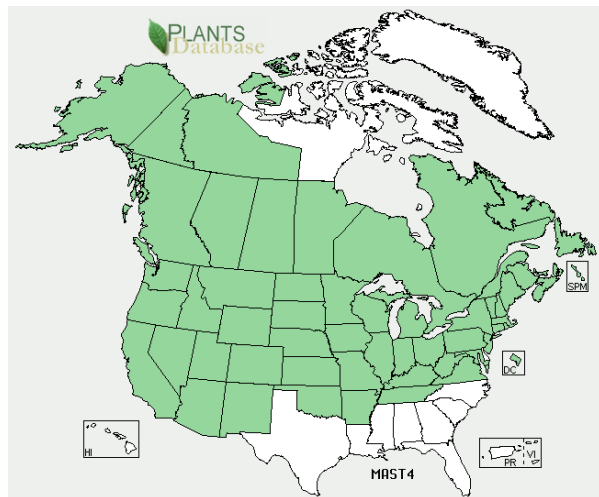


Plant Synonyms and Plant Photographs (if pertinent to or available for the selected taxon): The second and/or third areas will contain additional Plant Images and Plant Synonyms will be displayed above the “Distribution by State” map.

At the top of the “Images” area, a link will also be provided to all images of that particular genus that are available in PLANTS. Several sizes of images may be available, from thumbnail, standard, and large to publication size. If available, these can be viewed by clicking on the photo for the next size. On the “large” image page, there will be a link at the bottom of the page if there is a publication-sized image available for download. Thousands of line drawings are also available.

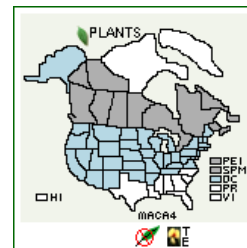
Plant Distribution: A map displays the state distribution (also territory and protectorate if available) as is currently known from specimens and the scientific literature.

If county level data are available, it is represented by the state abbreviations to the right of the map. You can click on the postal code or as you run your cursor over the map, your cursor will change to a hand for the states with underlying county data. For those states with “off-site” county data, this is noted under “Other Species Accounts and Images.” For off-site data, a new browser window will be brought up with the distant site in it.



The map and its functionality have been updated to reflect North America with links to access maps illustrating nativity. You can click the “View Native Status” link below left of the distributional map to view a native status map on the Plant Profile. The PLANTS Floristic Area (PFA) will eventually range from Puerto Rico/Virgin Islands in the Caribbean through North America (north of Mexico) to the Northern Mariana Islands encompassing the protectorates and territories of the Pacific Basin.

Native Status: PLANTS native status has been completely reworked to better assist the field. Native in PLANTS previously meant that it was native to the somewhere in the U.S. or its Caribbean territories. Now nativity can apply to various jurisdictions, such as, the lower 48 states, Alaska, Hawaii, or Puerto Rico. The nativity maps use blue (native) and gray (introduced) colors. Please consult the “Native Status” link to the left of the primary image on the Plant Profile for further definitions.



Related Taxa: Provides quick access to related taxa, either genera in the same family or species in the same genus.

Classification: Provides quick access to various levels of the taxon’s classification tree. Click on any of the highlighted levels.

**Noxious Weed Information** (if pertinent): Indicates if the plant is considered noxious by Federal or state governments, plus provides access to further information on the entities noxious weed list.

**Invasive Information** (if pertinent): If the plant has been noted as having invasive qualities in certain situations or environments by the sources integrated into PLANTS, then it will be indicated here and the citations are made available for further information. Depending upon the use that is being made of the plant, invasiveness could be a positive or negative value.

**Introduced Information** (if pertinent): If the plant is introduced into the U.S. (including PR and VI), it will be noted by the presence of this area.

**Wetlands Indicator Status** (if pertinent): If the plant has been classified by the USFWS as having wetland indicator status, the regional and national indicator status is shown.

**Other Species Accounts and Images** (if available): Certain sites that contain plentiful, high quality information on the plant are integrated into the Plant Profile in this area.

**Related Web Sites** (if available): For selected species, additional links to off-site information are acquired and maintained in this area.

**More Information:** At the top right of the Plant Profile (to the right of the main image) are located links for several items that may be available for the plant that you have selected. Just click on these to bring them up in a separate browser window.

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**Related Taxa**  
*Achnatherum hymenoides* (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Barkworth

View 334 genera in Poaceae, 37 species in Achnatherum

**Classification:**  
*Achnatherum hymenoides* (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Barkworth

Click on a scientific name below to expand it in the PLANTS Classification Report.

Kingdom	Plantae - Plants
Subkingdom	Tracheobionta - Vascular plants
Superdivision	Spermatophyta - Seed plants
Division	Angiosperms - Flowering plants
Class	Liliopsida - Monocotyledons
Subclass	Cornales
Order	Cyperales
Family	Poaceae - Grass family
Genus	<i>Achnatherum</i> Beauv. - needlegrass
Species	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i> (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Barkworth - Indian ricegrass

**Threatened and Endangered Plant Information:**  
*Achnatherum hymenoides* (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Barkworth

The synonyms italicized and indented below are listed by the U. S. federal government or a state. Common names are from state and federal lists. Click on a place name to get a complete protected plant list for that location.

Minnesota:  
*Oryzopsis hymenoides* (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Ricker ex Piper  
*Indian ricegrass* Endangered

**Wetland Indicator Status:**  
*Achnatherum hymenoides* (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Barkworth

GBIF: *Oryzopsis hymenoides*

Nat. Ind.	Reg. 1	Reg. 2	Reg. 3	Reg. 4	Reg. 5	Reg. 6	Reg. 7	Reg. 8	Reg. 9	Reg. 10	Reg. 11	
UPL	FACU	IND	IND	FACU	FACU	FACU	FACU	UPL	UPL	UPL	IND	IND

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**Related Web Sites:**  
*Achnatherum hymenoides* (Roemer & J.A. Schultes) Barkworth

- AZ-Northern Arizona University
- CA-Jepson Flora Project
- CO-Colorado State University Herbarium
- Canada-Saskatchewan-Rangeland Ecosystems and Plants
- Forestry Images
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
- NV-State Plants
- Native Plant Network Protocol Information
- OH-Ohio State University Seed Identification
- UK-Plants For A Future
- UT-Range Plants (USU)
- UT-State Plants
- UT-Water Wise Plants
- WA-Central Washington Native Plants

**Characteristics**  
Database containing ca. 100 plant attributes for this species. This is the VegSpec plant characteristics data for this species. Over 2,500 species in PLANTS have these data.

**Classification**  
Displays a hierarchical classification upward from the plant whose profile you are viewing.

**Plant Fact Sheet and Plant Guides**  
This is a narrative about this plant, which includes a description of uses, management, establishment, cultivars, references, etc. The Plant Guide provides more information than the Fact Sheet. If available, both are accessible as Word (doc) or Adobe Acrobat (pdf) files.

### Plant Source & References

This provides access to sources of taxonomic and distribution information/references that support the information on that species in PLANTS.

### PM Publications

This provides access to Plant Materials Publications, if they are available through PLANTS for the target plant.

## **C. Plant Topics**

Proceed back to the PLANTS Home Page and review the left hand navigation box entitled "Plant Topics" on the left of the screen.



### **1. Alternative Crops:**

Access set of links to off-site information on alternative crops. You can select by broad crop types and filter by states where the information is available.

### **2. Characteristics:**

List of the 2300+ conservation plant species for which the ca. 100 extended plant attributes are populated. From this list, you can click on the plant name to access its Plant Profile.

### **3. Classification:**

Generate a hierarchical classification beginning at any taxonomic level and moving up or down through the hierarchy. For example, an entry of *Elymus elymoides* will display all the subspecies of *Elymus elymoides*. An entry of *Elymus* will display all the species within the genus *Elymus*.

### **4. Culturally Significant:**

List of plant species that are culturally important to Native Americans. Access the Plant Profile by clicking on a name. Culturally significant information is contained in the Plant Guide of each species with a plant guide.

### **5. Distribution Update:**

This module was partially funded by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). This permits PLANTS users to submit new State or County records for consideration and validation based upon specimens deposited in herbaria or citations from the scientific literature. This module also has a GIS function that allows the user to indicate the location of the occurrence.

It also allows for the submission of observations. Observations are more difficult to validate and are less likely than herbarium specimens or literature citations to be certified. This portion is targeted toward weeds new to the nation, a state, or county as a part of the Early Warning, Rapid Response initiative of the Federal Interagency Committee on the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW).

In Step 1, there is a link at the bottom of the page that enables you to establish a new User ID and Password if you do not have one.

### **6. Fact Sheets & Plant Guides:**



Access a complete list of the plants for which PLANTS currently exhibits a Plant Fact Sheet or Plant Guide. Click on the doc or pdf file.

**7. Invasive & Noxious Weeds:**

- Federal Noxious Weed list.
- State Noxious Weed lists.
- Search for plant species that are noted as having invasive qualities by selected sources.

**8. Plant Materials Publications:**

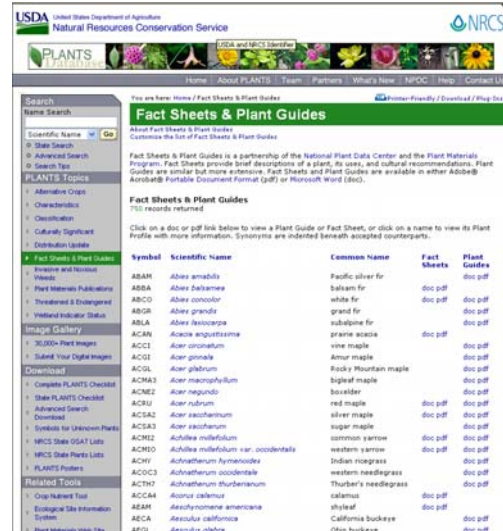
A search engine has been placed on indexed NRCS plant materials publications. Search by your keywords and other choices, review the documents, and then download the publications as pdf files. The NRCS Plant Materials discipline will continue to convert their publications and make them available through this venue.

**9. Threatened & Endangered:**

List of Federal and State T&E plant species by Family, Genus or State.

**10. Wetland Indicator Status:**

List of plant species and their USFWS wetland indicator status by Family, Genus or USFWS Region.



**D. Image Gallery**

This provides direct access to the PLANTS Image Gallery, where you are provided various query, viewing, and sorting options.

**E. Download:**

This area allows you access to download the following: 1) Complete PLANTS Checklist; 2) State PLANTS Checklist; 3) Advanced Search Download; 4) Symbols for Unknown Plants; 5) NRCS State GSAT Lists; 6) NRCS State Plants Lists; and 7) PLANTS Posters.

**1. Complete PLANTS Checklist:**

This is a very large ASCII file (about 7MB) that contains all accepted and synonym names.

**2. State PLANTS Checklist:**

This are provides access to state vascular plant checklists that are a subdivision of the national plant checklist. Just click on the state or territory in which you are interested.

**3. Advanced Search Download:**

This is the same capability as the Advanced Search in the "Search" area, but brings up the download portion of that search.

**a. Downloading Data From PLANTS Into An Excel Spreadsheet:** This is something that we are asked about quite a bit, particularly when folks are downloading data from the [Advanced Search](#) (located in the top of the left navigation box on the PLANTS Home Page). Note that at the top of the page, it states “**Search the PLANTS database and display the results.**” Just below that heading you can click on “**Search the PLANTS database and download the results without display.**”

First, let’s address “**Search the PLANTS database and display the results.**” After you make your selections and click the “Display Report Now” button, the data are displayed. If you read “About the download from this page,” it will tell you how to download the data into a text file. Once you have saved a text file on your computer, then use the following instructions:

- Assume that the text file that was downloaded from the Advanced Search has the name ‘ag234.txt’
- Open Microsoft Excel – click “File/Open”
- In the ‘Open’ dialogue box go to the directory where you saved the downloaded text file.
- At the bottom of the ‘Open’ dialogue box, select “Text Files” from the ‘Files of type’ menu.
- Open the file ‘ag234.txt’
- In the Text Import Wizard, select “Delimited” – click “Next”
- Select “Comma” – click “Next”
- Select “General” – click “Finish”
- This file can be saved as a Microsoft Excel file. Click “File/save As”, in the ‘Save as type’ menu, then select “Microsoft Office Excel Workbook”

A second method is as follows. If you open the Advanced Search and click on “**Search the PLANTS database and download the results without display,**” it will permit you to download a comma delimited text file. After you make your selections, click on the “Download Report Now” button, the instructions are in the lines above the “PLANTS Download” box. You can also right click on the “PLANTS Download” link and then “Save Target As” (text file) in a particular directory on your computer for further use. This file can be imported into Microsoft Excel as described in the bulleted instructions.

#### **4. Symbols for Unknown Plants:**

The symbols for unknown plants represent generic categories such as ‘deciduous tree’ or ‘herbaceous vine’ that are useful in survey, monitoring, and inventory work when specific identification can not be made. These symbols and associated descriptive names are widely used by a number of federal agencies. The list contains only symbols and common names.

#### **5. NRCS State GSAT Lists:**

This area provides access to the State Grazing and Spatial Analysis Tool lists for loading into GSAT software. Not all state lists are available. For more information, please contact your state grazing lands specialist.

## 6. NRCS State Plants Lists:

NRCS personnel and cooperators can download an NRCS State Plants List which includes Symbol, Synonym Symbol, Scientific Name with Authors, preferred State Common Name, and Family. The data are downloaded as uncompressed ASCII text.

## 7. PLANTS Posters:

This provides a link to the NPDC Web site where you can download a PLANTS poster to place on your wall.

## F. Related Tools

Proceed back to the PLANTS Home Page and view the “Related Tools” toward the bottom of the left navigation box. This provides access to other plant-related tools.



### 1. Crop Nutrient Tool:

The Crop Nutrient Tool provides estimates of nutrient removal by crops at various levels. The nutrient percentages utilized in this tool reflect national averages. These estimates are used to calculate nutrient balance sheets, which are employed in the design of animal waste management systems. The Crop Nutrient Tool automates and augments the information that is currently in Chapter 6 of the NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook.

### 2. Ecological Site Information System (ESIS):

The Ecological Site Description is the official repository for all data associated with the development of forestland and rangeland ecological site descriptions by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. An ecological site description is presented in four major categories:

- **Site Characteristics** - Identifies the site and describes the physiographic, climate, soil, and water features associated with the site.
- **Plant Communities** - Describes the ecological dynamics and the common plant communities comprising the various vegetation states of the site.
- **Site Interpretations** - Interpretive information pertinent to the use and management of the site and its related resources.
- **Supporting Information** - Information useful in assessing the quality of the site description and its relationship to other ecological sites.

Example: Select a state and/or a MLRA. For example State = MT and MLRA = 58A. A MLRA is an homogenous eco-region.

An MLRA map is on the Internet from the NRCS National Soil Survey Center.

[http://soils.usda.gov/soil\\_survey/geography/mlra/main.htm](http://soils.usda.gov/soil_survey/geography/mlra/main.htm)

The Ecological Site Description displays a site description under the following reports.

General	Physiographic Features
Climate Features	Water Features
Soil Features	Plant Communities
Site Interpretations	Supporting Information

The site ID is based on soil type. Map locations of site IDs are available from local NRCS field offices.

### **3. Plant Materials:**

Provides access to the NRCS Plant Materials discipline Home Page information about using plants for conservation practices.

### **4. Other NRCS Tech Resources:**

Provides a link to other NRCS Technical Resources

### **5. VegSpec:**

Vegspec is a web-based decision support system that assists land managers in the planning and design of vegetative establishment practices. VegSpec utilizes soil, plant, and climate data to select plant species that are (1) site-specifically adapted, (2) suitable for the selected practice, and (3) appropriate for the purposes and objectives for which the planting is intended. The VegSpec application has the ability to determine site-specific adaptability of plant species. Please utilize "Introduction to VegSpec" in another document on the NPDC Web site under Publications.

An MLRA map is on the Internet from the NRCS National Soil Survey Center.

[http://soils.usda.gov/soil\\_survey/geography/mlra/main.htm](http://soils.usda.gov/soil_survey/geography/mlra/main.htm)

### **G. Plant Links:**

Access general plant-related links, such as State Floras, Fire Resistance, Native Plants and Gardening, Poisonous and Medicinal Plant Links, Landscaping, and Educational.

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