

# Devils Tower

National Monument  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## A Living Monument: Devils Tower Plants

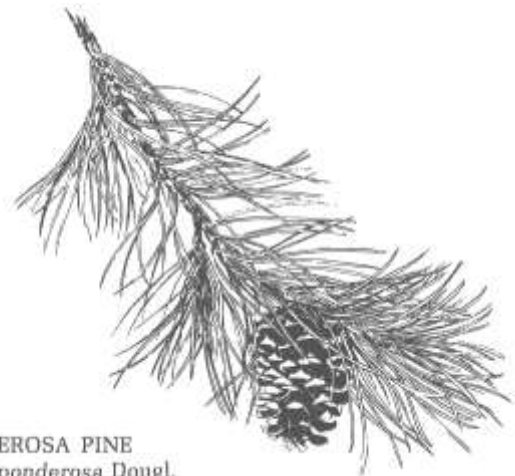
**THIS MOCK-UP IS FOR NPS REVIEW AND  
IS NOT FORMATTED TO THE STANDARDS  
OF NPS PUBLICATIONS**



*The plant life of Devils Tower National Monument offered food, fuel and shelter for Devils Tower visitors in early times, and provides a source of wonder for visitors of all times. Devils Tower plants are like a living monument, a view of the past...and the future.*

### Ponderosa pine

If trees talked, you might listen for a grand speech from Ponderosa pine. More than any other plant, it was fuel and shelter, and even food. Pine trees provided tipi poles and firewood. The sweet sap of the inner bark may have also provided a ration when food was scarce in early spring. As the most conspicuous plant at Devils Tower, Ponderosa pine woodlands flank the Tower and shelter its visitors in shade. Nowadays, it is also at the center of attention in addressing Black Hills land management challenges when it comes to disease, fire, and stand conditions.



PONDEROSA PINE  
*Pinus ponderosa* Dougl.

Illustration by Jacqueline Moore \*

### Chokecherry

Plants such as chokecherry are Nature's convenience store. Some tribes marked seasons by it. The berries of chokecherry could be dried and pounded with buffalo meat and fat into pemmican as perfect blend of texture, flavor, and nutrition for winter rations. Chokecherry spreads by vegetative shoots and its leaves are unpalatable, so it forms dense thickets that shelter wildlife. The wood of chokecherry was used by some tribes for arrow shafts and bows.



CHOCKECHERRY  
*Prunus virginiana* L.



## Prairie sage

(also called White sage)

White sage grows along human foot paths and travel routes, past and present. It flourishes in places at the base of Devils Tower. It is one of the most widely used American plants for burning as incense. Across western landscapes, the fresh fragrance of this herbaceous sage and its relatives, the woody sagebrushes, permeates the air after a rain. It contains a class of natural oils that were the basis for Old West stories of riding long miles buoyed by fresh pharmacy-like fragrance.

PRAIRIE SAGE  
*Artemisia ludoviciana*



Illustration by Jacqueline Moore \*

## Purple coneflower

Purple coneflower was a medicine chest-of-a-plant by all accounts. It was reportedly used by traders and tribes to treat rattlesnake bite. Its roots were chewed as a natural salivant to quell thirst on the dry plains. The roots were an early pain-reliever for tooth-aches and abrasions. Finally, the roots were ground and brewed into a tea to build up resistance to common ailments like colds. A spurt of commercial interest in Echinacea tea prompted collecting on the Great Plains in the 1990's – and over-collecting in many cases.



Illustration by Jacqueline Moore \*

## Blue grama

Blue grama is a classic short grass of western plains. Migrating bison traced its seasonal growth. It is highly palatable to elk, pronghorn and livestock. Blue grama anchors the ranching industry, literally and figuratively, in providing sod-forming ground cover, year-round forage, and roots that are many times deeper below ground than the height of the plant above. It is a warm-season grass that is tolerant of cold, drought and alkalinity. The gracefully curving seed heads make it among the easiest of grasses to recognize, as seen in the latter half of the year.



Illustration from Hitchcock, A.S. (rev. A. Chase). 1950. Manual of the grasses of the United States. USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 200. Washington, DC.

*Interested in more information?* Pick up the checklist of common Devils Tower plants. Or go on-line through NPSpecies to download the full Devils Tower flora of over 400 plants to use with your favorite field guides or floras at: <https://irma.nps.gov/npspecies>.

*Please leave all plants of Devils Tower as you find them.*

**Big bluestem**  
(also called Turkey-foot)

Big bluestem is a warm-season grass that grows slowly in spring and early summer, with stems usually at full height by mid-summer. It towers over tall-grass prairies in the Midwest, where it often grew to adult eye-level, lending itself to landscape descriptions of “seas of grass.” It doesn’t have the rainfall and deep soils to support that height at its western limits, but is still highly palatable to livestock and to wildlife. Well-developed stands make excellent nesting and protective cover for small mammals, and its seeds are important food for birds. The bluish-green color of the new stem is not always as noticeable as the reddish cast it takes on in fall.



Illustration from Hitchcock,  
A.S. (rev. A. Chase). 1950.  
Manual of the grasses of  
the United States. USDA  
Miscellaneous Publication  
No. 200. Washington, DC.

---

<sup>1</sup> A sixth species, big bluestem, is included as an addition or alternative to the five other species depending on format standards, composition, and illustration size.