

A Sea of Grass



photos courtesy NPS

Mini Fact:

Prairie managers set grasses on fire to control the burn and make the soil more fertile.

A special system

Prairies are one of the most special ecosystems, or habitats, in the world. They have a wide variety of plants and animals. Many experts believe the only ecosystem with more variety is the rainforest in Brazil.

The **diversity**, or variety, in the prairie system helps to keep it healthy.

Weather can range from very hot to very cold. Drought, tornadoes and blizzards also strike in the prairie.

Types of prairies

There are three types of prairies: **tallgrass**, **mixed grass** and **shortgrass**. The tallgrass prairie gets the most rain; the shortgrass gets the least. The mixed-grass prairie falls in between.

Prairie plants

Plants growing in the prairie have developed thinner leaves than most other plants. That way they lose less moisture from evaporation.

Prairie plants also may have hairlike growths on their leaves. The hair helps capture the morning dew.

The plants on prairies have extra-long roots. Some can go as deep as 20 feet.



Coneflowers



Bison were once hunted almost to extinction. This herd grazes on the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas.

Prairie animals

About 300 **species**, or types, of birds, about 80 species of mammals and hundreds of species of insects live in the prairie.

Because there are so few trees, birds such as prairie chickens build their nests on the ground, hidden by the tall grasses.

Small mammals such as prairie dogs and badgers make homes by tunneling underground. They run into their burrows to escape predators, grass fires or heat.

Large mammals, such as bison, graze on the tall grasses, moving from place to place. Before settlers arrived, the American elk grazed on the tallgrass prairie. The destruction of their habitat has pushed most of them out of the prairies and into mountain areas.

photo by Missy Galdo Allen, courtesy NPS

Resources



On the Web:

- nps.gov/tapr

At the library:

- “Bluestem Horizon: A Story of a Tallgrass Prairie” by Evelyn Lee

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of prairies are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



BADGER, BISON,
BLIZZARD, BURN,
CLIMATE, DIVERSITY,
ECOSYSTEM, ELK,
FERTILE, MEADOW,
PIONEERS, PRAIRIE,
SCHOONER, SEA,
SETTLERS, SHORTGRASS,
SPECIES, TALLGRASS,
TORNADO.

B	W	S	H	O	R	T	G	R	A	S	S	D	S	B
I	N	Y	T	I	S	R	E	V	I	D	Q	E	E	L
S	R	E	E	N	O	I	P	L	S	E	U	I	T	I
O	U	R	N	T	O	R	N	A	D	O	P	R	T	Z
N	B	U	M	E	T	S	Y	S	O	C	E	I	L	Z
B	A	D	G	E	R	W	O	D	A	E	M	A	E	A
H	B	E	M	E	E	L	I	T	R	E	F	R	R	R
Y	L	S	S	A	R	G	L	L	A	T	P	P	S	D
K	N	M	V	S	C	H	O	O	N	E	R	V	H	I
Q	E	T	A	M	I	L	C	S	E	I	C	E	P	S

Cook's Corner

Cheesy-Topped Tomatoes

You'll need:

- 4 medium-size tomatoes
- 1 cup seasoned bread crumbs
- dash of salt and pepper

- 1/2 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons dill weed



What to do:

1. Cut tomatoes in half and arrange with sliced side up on a microwavable dish.
2. Sprinkle with bread crumbs, salt and pepper.
3. Cook, uncovered, in a microwave oven on medium power for 2 minutes.
4. Remove tomatoes and sprinkle with cheese and then dill weed.
5. Place dish in microwave again and cook on high power for 1 more minute.
6. Let cool and serve. Makes 8 servings.

* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

1. An open field that grows wild (6-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □

2. Green plant with thin, pointed leaves (5-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □

3. A group of living things that can find food (7-letter plural noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

4. Area without woody plants with long trunks or branches (8-letter adj)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

1. Franco watched butterflies in the _____ behind the barn.
2. Julie walked and played in the _____ in her bare feet.
3. Susie identified birds, fish and insects as _____.
4. Nothing grew tall in the _____ vacant lot next door.

ROOTONYM®
by Jan & Carey Orr Cook



Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Meadow, Grass, Animals, Treeless.

Mini Jokes



Patsy: What do you call a single bison?

Paul: A buffaloney!

Eco Note



Human activities have caused almost 600 plant species to go extinct over the past 250 years, according to scientists from Britain's Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew and Sweden's Stockholm University. The loss is occurring up to 500 times faster than the rate plants would naturally disappear. Their research found that plants have gone extinct twice as fast as birds, mammals and amphibians since 1753. The loss has been highest on islands, in the tropics and in regions with a Mediterranean climate.

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For later:

Look in your newspaper for articles about animals and plants in the wild.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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