

Prairie Dropseed

Sporobolus heterolepis

Description

Prairie Dropseed is a perennial grass that grows in dense clumps that produces many fine, drooping leaves. Its flowering stems usually reach 16 to 40 inches (4-10 dm) in height. The leaves are 5 to 14 inches (12-35 cm) long and up to 1/10 inch (2.5 mm) wide. The blades usually have in-rolled edges and are slightly rough to the touch. The flowers can be found singly in small spikelets. The spikelets are reddish to lead-colored and are held in long, narrowly pyramidal, branched clusters. *Heterolepis* means “different scales” and refers to the two scales, or glumes, at the base of each spikelet that are unequal in length.



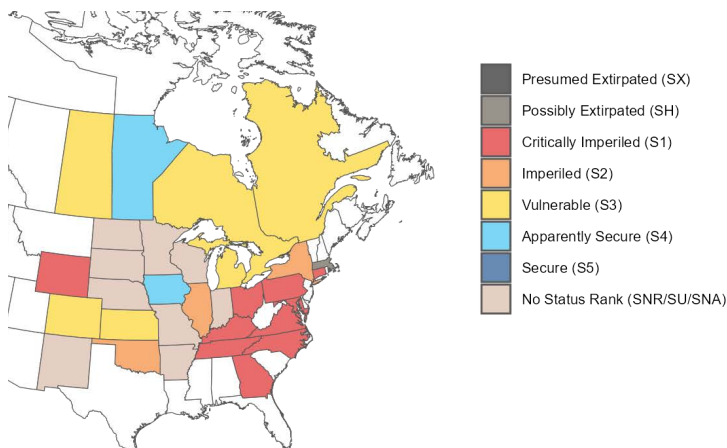
Photo source: PNHP

Distribution & Habitat

Prairie Dropseed occurs in the U. S. from New York south to Georgia and west to Montana through New Mexico. In Pennsylvania, it can be found growing in serpentine barrens from Lancaster and Chester Counties.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



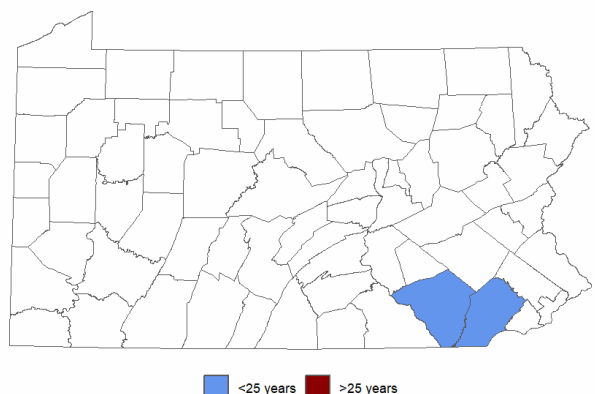
Current State Status

This species thrives in serpentine barrens, which is a globally rare plant community that is well represented in southeastern Pennsylvania. Land conversion for development, dumping, and fragmentation have degraded the quality of some these rare habitats. In addition, the open nature of the habitats required by prairie dropseed is in some cases threatened by the encroachment of woody or invasive plants. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.

Conservation Considerations

Maintenance of known populations and preservation of the rare communities, such as serpentine barrens, where plain ragwort grows will be crucial to its survival. Removal of overgrowth and invasive species with the integration of fire regimes, when appropriate, will help to preserve the integrity of the sites. The management of the known sites requires long term monitoring of populations. Potential sites for restoration should be evaluated.

Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)



NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally Secure; **S1**– Critically Imperiled in Pennsylvania



References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2025.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.