

# Endangered Plants

By Jieyu Jiang

We often hear on the news about an animal or organism that is **endangered** and facing **extinction**. But did you know that out of every 10 species listed as endangered, 6 of them are plants?

Plants such as the Prairie Milkweed on the grasslands of the Dakotas and varieties in Australia are referred to as endangered because their numbers have shrunk so much that they are in danger of becoming extinct. Very few specimens of them remain on earth, and we must do all we can in our power to help them if they are to survive.

Plants are essential to our survival; we need them to breathe, to eat and to live. Plants provide us with food, shelter and clothing. **Biodiversity**, the number and variety of organisms found within a specific geographic region, is extremely important to us. We humans use at least 40,000 species of plants and animals on a daily basis. But ever since humans have become the dominant animal on Earth, different kinds of plants have been slowly disappearing.



Some biomes' plant species have been more affected by humans than others. Take grasslands for instance. The huge sea of prairie in North Dakota and neighboring states now has been plowed to make room for crops, grazing cattle, farms, power plants, and shelterbelts, which are barriers of trees and shrubs that protect the open land against the wind and reduces erosion.

Also, new and exotic species are constantly introduced to the grasslands that inhibit, or stop, the growth of native plants. For example, Kentucky bluegrass now suppresses many native species, such as those in the Milkweed family, which are tall grasses in the prairie. The bluegrass competes with milkweed for nutrients and it reproduces faster than the milkweed.

Examples of other endangered species on the grasslands are Fleabane, Frostweed, Beach Heather, Pinweed, Prairie Phlox, and Dakota Buckwheat. There are too many to list them all!

Remember, our survival depends on the plants on this earth. Plants help keep a balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and we use them and eat them every day.