

Common Herbaceous Plants of the Chicagoland Region

Created by Logan Novak for Plants of Concern

This guide is in no way a complete guide of the herbaceous plant species in the Chicagoland region, but was created to help discern common species. Plant families are broken down by common characteristics, which can be narrowed using the detailed descriptions below. Common associate species are listed under their corresponding family. **The key refers to characteristics that may not apply to all members of the family, but to the common associate species listed below.** All species are listed under their families according to *Flora of the Chicago Region: A Floristic and Ecological Synthesis*.

Major characteristics of common plant families:

Families containing grass-like plants:

- Cyperaceae
- Juncaceae
- Poaceae
- Typhaceae
- Iridaceae
- Hypoxidaceae
- Commelinaceae

Families containing ferns and horsetails:

- Equisetaceae
- Onocleaceae
- Thelypteridaceae

Families containing plants with milky sap:

- Asclepidaceae
- Lobeliaceae
- Euphorbiaceae

Families containing plants with basal leaves:

- Papaveraceae
- Alismataceae

- Hydrophyllaceae
- Violaceae
- Parnassiaceae
- Primulaceae
- Tofieldiaceae
- Hypoxidaceae
- Iridaceae
- Onobanchaceae
- Ranunculaceae
- Rosaceae
- Typhaceae
- Cyperaceae
- Onocleaceae
- Thelypteridaceae
- Juncaceae

Families containing plants with whorled leaves:

- Trilliaceae
- Rubiaceae
- Scrophulariaceae
- Asclepiadaceae
- Asteraceae

Families containing plants with stamens of different lengths:

- Brassicaceae
- Scrophulariaceae

Families containing plants with flowers surrounded by a leaf or modified leaf:

- Alliaceae
- Araceae

Families containing plants with flowers on single, terminal flower heads:

- Asteraceae
- Aristolochiaceae
- Araceae
- Balsaminaceae

- Berberidaceae
- Cyperaceae
- Geraniaceae
- Iridaceae
- Liliaceae
- Lobeliaceae
- Papaveraceae
- Parnassiaceae
- Rosaceae
- Trilliaceae
- Violaceae
- Poaceae
- Juncaceae

Families containing plants with opposite leaves:

- Lamiaceae
- Urticaceae
- Geraniaceae
- Myrsinaceae
- Onograceae
- Onobbranchaceae
- Polemoniaceae
- Verbenaceae
- Lythraceae

Families containing plants with flowers in umbels:

- Apiaceae
- Santalaceae

Families containing plants with fused petals or petaloid structures:

- Boraginaceae
- Aristolochiaceae
- Convallariaceae
- Iridaceae

Families containing plants with stipules:

- Caesalpiniaceae
- Fabaceae
- Geraniaceae
- Polygonaceae
- Portulacaceae
- Rubiaceae
- Violaceae

Families containing plants with leaves that clasp the stem:

- Colchicaceae
- Asteraceae

Families containing plants lacking petals or petaloid structures:

- Chenopodiaceae
- Araceae
- Cyperaceae
- Poaceae
- Equisetaceae
- Polygonaceae
- Typhaceae
- Onocleaceae
- Thelypteridaceae

Families containing plants with flowers in a spadix, spike, or spikelet:

- Scrophulariaceae
- Poaceae
- Cyperaceae
- Araceae
- Lythraceae
- Orobanchaceae
- Typhaceae
- Urticaceae
- Verbenaceae

Family Descriptions:

Alismataceae (Water Plantain Family)

Long thin leafstalks that grow from the base, plants can grow submerged in water, three sepals and three petals, leaves all basal with palmate veins and have leaf stalks, 3 green sepals 3 white petals and stamens and pistils can vary, inflorescences occur in spikes or panicles

-*Sagittaria latifolia*

Sagittaria latifolia by Jason Miller, POC Staff



Alliaceae (Onion Family)

Have large bulbs, have leafless stalks growing directly from ground, have linear or ovate leaves, flowers in umbels, 6 sepals and 6 petals and 6 stamens, flowers often surrounded by a modified leaf, fruits are 3-valved capsules

-*Allium cernuum*

-*Allium tricoccum*

Allium cernuum by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Apiaceae (Parsley Family)

Leaves alternate and usually compound, flowers are small in umbels (flat clusters), flowers have 5 petals 5 sepals and 5 stamens, petals distinct, fruit usually ridged or winged, petals often unequally sized, ovary inferior, 2 distinct styles

-*Zizia aurea*

-*Eryngium yuccifolium*

-*Sanicula gregaria*

-*Sium suave*

-*Oxypolis rigidior*

Zizia aurea by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Araceae (Arum Family)

Flowers grow in spadix (fleshy columns) often surrounded by a leafy structure (spathe)

- Arisaema triphyllum*
- Arisaema dracontium*
- Symplocarpus foetidus*

Arisaema triphyllum by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Aristolochiaceae (Birthwort Family)

alternate simple leaves, flowers perfect, 3 petaloid sepals that are fused, usually 6 or 12 stamens, stamens usually fused, ovary inferior

- Asarum canadense*

Asarum canadense by Jason Miller, POC Staff



-Asclepiadaceae (Milkweed Family)

White milky sap, Leaves usually opposite, Leaf edges smooth, Flowers grow in clusters, fruits are follicles containing many hairy seeds

- Asclepias verticillata*
- Asclepias syriaca*
- Asclepias incarnata*

Asclepias verticillata by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Asteraceae (Aster Family)

Flowers on single terminal heads, can have disk florets and/or ray florets, corollas (whorl of petals) tubular (disc) or strap-shaped (ligulate), can have heads with ligulate ray flowers or both ray flowers and disc flowers or disc flowers alone

Silphium perfoliatum by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



-Solidago altissima
-Solidago canadensis
-Solidago graminifolia
-Solidago ulmifolia
-Solidago flexicaulis
-Solidago rigida
-Solidago nemoralis
-Solidago ohioensis
-Solidago riddellii
-Solidago gigantea
-Solidago uliginosa
-Solidago speciosa
-Solidago juncea
-Silphium terebinthinaceum
-Silphium laciniatum
-Silphium perfoliatum
-Silphium integrifolium
-Helianthus grosseserratus
-Helianthus strumosus
-Helianthus occidentalis
-Aster macrophyllus
-Aster novae-angliae
-Aster ericoides
-Aster pilosus
-Aster sagittifolius var. Dummondii
-Coreopsis tripteris
-Rudbeckia hirta
-Ratibida pinnata
-Eupatorium rugosum
-Eupatorium altissimum
-Eupatorium maculatum
-Eupatorium perfoliatum
-Eupatorium purpureum
-Helianthus divaricatus
-Aster lateriflorus

- Eupatorium serotinum*
- Liatris spicata*
- Liatris aspera*
- Liatris pycnostachya*
- Cirsium discolor*
- Parthenium integrifolium*
- Senecio pauperculus*
- Artemisia caudata*
- Erigeron annuus*
- Prenanthes alba*
- Vernonia fasciculata*
- Achillea millefolium*
- Antennaria neglecta*
- Ambrosia artemisiifolia* var. *Elatior*

Balsaminaceae (Touch-Me-Not Family)

Leaves simple, Serrated leaves, spurred flowers, flowers have five stamens 5 petals, fruit usually a capsule with 4-5 ridges or valves

- Impatiens capensis***

Impatiens capensis by Jason Miller, POC Staff



Brassicaceae (Mustard Family)

Flowers have four petals arranged in a cross, seed pods open from both sides and form around a central stem, flowers usually have 4 long stamens and two short stamens, sap watery, leaves alternate, flowers in spikes or racemes, 4 sepals 4 petals or no petals, 6 stamens with 2 shorter than rest, fruit is a capsule-like silique or silicle

- Dentaria laciniata***
- Cakile edentula***
- Cardamine bulbosa***

Cardamine bulbosa by Katy Chakya, Minnesota Wildflowers



Berberidaceae (Barberry Family)

Flowers regular and perfect, ovary superior, fruit a capsule or berry, perianth parts in 4s or 6s

-Podophyllum peltatum

Podophyllum peltatum by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Boraginaceae (Borage Family)

Simple alternate leaves, flowers in fiddlehead or cymes, fruit usually in 4 nutlets, flowers 5-parted, petals fused

-Lithospermum canescens

Lithospermum canescens by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Caesalpiniaaceae (Caesalpinia Family)

Leaves alternate and usually compound, leaves usually stipulate, 5 separate petals that are perigynous, 5 sepals and 10 stamens, fruit is a single-seeded long pod (legume)

-Chamaecrista fasciculata (Cassia fasciculata)

Chamaecrista fasciculata by Jason Miller, POC Staff



Chenopodiaceae (Goosefoot Family)

Commonly red-tinged, leaves simple and usually alternate, flowers non-showy, seeds usually lenticular, petals absent

-Cycloloma atriplicifolium

Cycloloma atriplicifolium by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Commelinaceae (Spiderwort Family)

Leaves alternate, leaves parallel veined and sheathing at the base, 6 stamens 3 green sepals, 3 blue/white petals unfused, 1 style, fruit is a capsule with 2 or 3 valves

-Tradescantia ohiensis

Tradescantia ohiensis by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Colchicaceae (Colchicum Family)

Leaves alternate or basal, flowers have 6 tepals that are separate, 6 stamens, 1 or 3 styles, fruit a capsule

-Uvularia grandiflora

Uvularia grandiflora by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Convallariaceae (Mayflower Family)

Leaves alternate or basal, flowers axillary or in racemes, 2 or 3 sepals and petals either distinct or united, stamens 4 or 6, fruit are berries

-Polygonatum biflorum var. commutatum (Polygonatum canaliculatum)

-Smilacina racemosa

-Smilacina stellata

Smilacina stellata by John Hilty, Illinois Wildflowers



Cyperaceae (Sedge Family)

Grass-like plants with round or triangular stems and leaves arranged in a spiral in groups of three, sheaths closed, flowers subtended by a scale, fruit are achenes, 2 or 3 styles



Carex pennsylvanica by Peter m. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

- Carex pennsylvanica**
- Carex stricta**
- Carex sterilis**
- Carex viridula**
- Carex crawei**
- Carex blanda**
- Eleocharis compressa**
- Scirpus acutus**
- Scirpus pendulus**
- Scirpus pungens**
- Eleocharis rostellata**
- Scirpus atrovirens**

Equisetaceae (Horsetail Family)

Stems and branches terete and jointed, leafy fronds absent, sporangium cone-like and terminal

- Equisetum arvense**
- Equisetum hyemale**

Equisetum arvense by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Euphorbiaceae (Spruce Family)

Sap is white latex, true petals absent, 3-6 stigmas, fruit is a 3-lobed capsule, ovary has 3 loci

- Euphorbia corollata**
- Chamaesyce polygonifolia**

Euphorbia corollata by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Fabaceae (Pea Family)

Nitrogen-fixing plants, flowers are irregular usually with 4 petals, petals: 1 standard, 2 wings, 1 keel, flowers have 10 stamens, leaves often pinnately compound, leaves alternate, usually stipulate, fruit is a several-seeded long pod

- Lespedeza capitata**
- Amphicarpaea bracteata**
- Dalea purpurea**
- Baptisia leucantha**

Lespedeza capitata by Jason Miller, POC Staff



Geraniaceae (Geranium Family)

leaves stipulate, leaves opposite divided cauline leaves, flowers regular 5 parted, petals unfused, 10 or 15 stamens, 1-seeded

- Geranium maculatum**

Geranium maculatum by John Hilty, Illinois Wildflowers



Hydrophyllaceae (Waterleaf Family)

Basal and cauline leaves, leaves usually lobed, flowers 5-parted, 5 stamens, fruit a 2-4 valved many seeded capsule

- Hydrophyllum virginianum**

Hydrophyllum virginianum by Jason Miller, POC Staff



-Hypoxidaceae (Yellow Star Grass Family)

Scapose, linear-leaved, usually hairy, 6-parted perianths and inferior ovaries, 1 style, capsule has 3 loci

- Hypoxis hirsuta**

Hypoxis hirsuta by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

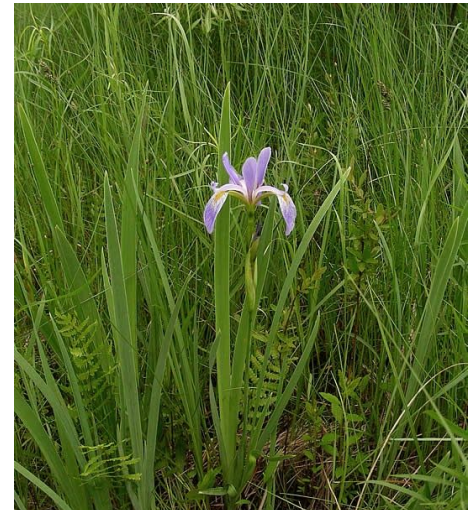


Iridaceae (Iris Family)

leaves are sheathed, 3 sepals and 3 petals, petals fused into a tube, 3 stamens, ovary inferior, fruit is a capsule with many seeds and 3 loci

- Iris virginica var. Shrevei**
- Sisyrinchium albidium**

Iris virginica by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Juncaceae (Rush Family)

Grass-like plants, stems hollow and usually unbranched, leaves linear or thread-like, flowers in cymes, flowers can be singular or clustered and found in terminal inflorescences, flowers with 3 sepals, 3 or 6 stamens, and 3 petals, fruits are a capsule with 3 loci and 3-many seeds

- Juncus balticus**
- Juncus dudleyi**
- Juncus torreyi**
- Juncus balticus var. Littoralis**

Juncus torreyi by Jason Miller, POC Staff



Lamiaceae (Mint Family)

Opposite leaves, plants often aromatic, leaves without stipules, flowers perfect, stems square and often hairy, four stamens-two long and two short, 2 or 4 stamens, ovary 4-lobed, fruits are nutlets

- Monarda fistulosa**
- Pycnanthemum virginianum**
- Lycopus americanus**
- Scutellaria parvula**
- Satureja arkansana**

Monarda fistulosa by John Hilty, Illinois Wildflowers



Liliaceae (Lily Family)

Six tepals, six stamens, superior ovary and three-lobed, fruit a capsule

-Erythronium albidum

Erythronium albidum by unknown, Chicago Botanic Garden



Lobeliaceae (Lobelia Family)

Milky sap, alternate simple leaves, flowers on twisted racemes such that the upper lobe is the lower, corollas irregular, 5 stamens, 1 style, 2 stigmas, fruit is a capsule,

-Lobelia kalmii

-Lobelia spicata

Lobelia spicata by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Lythraceae (Loosestrife Family)

Leaves simple and without stipules, leaves usually either opposite or whorled, flowers 4-8 parted, ovary superior, filaments unequal, 1 style, stigma usually capitate, fruit is a capsule

-Lythrum alatum

Lythrum alatum by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Myrsinaceae (Myrsine Family)

Leaves simple and unlobed, leaves often opposite or whorled, flowers 4-6 parted, flowers have sepals and petals, ovary superior, sepals unfused, 1 style, fruits either a many-seeded capsule or single-seeded drupe

-*Lysimachia quadriflora*

Lysimachia quadriflora by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

Onagraceae (Evening Primrose Family)

Leaves without stipules, flowers parts in 4s, ovary inferior, 1 style, 2-4 lobed or capitate (ending in a distinct head) stigma, fruit usually a capsule, Stigma is cross-shaped, floral parts usually in fours,

-*Oenothera biennis*

-*Circaea lutetiana* var. *canadensis*

Circaea lutetiana var. *canadensis* by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

Onocleaceae (Sensitive Fern Family)

Leaves are fronds, spores found on smaller and darker fronds, blades pinnate and deeply lobed, leaf stalks are chestnut-colored, sori hidden on inrolled edges of the pinnules

-*Onoclea sensibilis*

Onoclea sensibilis by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Orobanchaceae (Broom Rape Family)

Root parasites without chlorophyll or hemiparasites with chlorophyll, flowers perfect and irregular, 4-5 stamens, ovary superior with 1, 2, or 4 loci, style is terminal, stigma is usually capitate, fruits are many-seeded 2 valved capsules

-Pedicularis canadensis

-Pedicularis lanceolata

-Agalinis purpurea



Pedicularis canadensis by Jason Miller, POC Staff

Papaveraceae (Poppy Family)

Leaves usually alternate, flowers perfect, flowers singular or clustered in terminal inflorescences, flowers large and often nodding, fruits are capsules, leaves usually lobed or compound, ovary superior

-Sanguinaria canadensis



Sanguinaria canadensis by Jason Miller, POC Staff

Parnassiaceae (Grass of Parnassus Family)

Leaves unlobed, scapes with single flowers, 5 sepals fused at the base, 5 white-creamy petals, strongly veined, stamens bearing anthers, 5 stamens, ovary with 1 loci, 4 sessile stigmas, fruits are 4-valved capsules,

-Parnassia glauca



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Parnassia glauca by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

Poaceae (Grasses Family)

Flowers in spikelets composed of scale-like bracts, stems flat or round, leaf sheath encircles the stem and almost always open, blades are usually long and thin, fruits are usually dry, 2 or 3 styles or stigmas, stems usually hollow

- Andropogon gerardii**
- Sorghastrum nutans**
- Andropogon scoparius**
- Sporobolus heterolepis**
- Spartina pectinata**
- Panicum virgatum**
- Ammophila breviligulata**
- Calamagrotis canadensis**
- Schizachyrium scoparium**
- Glyceria striata**
- Bouteloua curtipendula**
- Elymus canadensis**
- Elymus hystrix (Hystrix patula)**
- Deschampsia caespitosa var. Glauca**
- Panicum implicatum**
- Triplasis purpurea**
- Deschampsia caespitosa**
- Elymus virginicus**
- Leersia oryzoides**
- Panicum oligosanthos var. Scribnerianum**



Panicum virgatum by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

Polemoniaceae (Phlox Family)

Leaves without stipules, flowers 5-parted, flowers perfect, ovary has 3 loci, styles are 3-lobed, usually 5 stamens, fruits are capsule with few-many seeds, seeds have spiral-shaped threads

- Phlox divaricata**

Phlox divaricata by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Polygonaceae (Buckwheat Family)

Leaves simple and alternate, stipules merge and form a sheath around the stem at the base of the leaf petiole, flowers usually perfect, petals absent, ovary superior, flowers grow in racemes or cymes, fruits are achenes, 2-3 styles

-*Polygonum virginianum*

Polygonum virginianum by George H. Bruso, Lady Bird Johnson
Wildflower Center

Portulacaceae (Purslane Family)

Leaves simple and un-lobed, leaves often stipulate, usually 2 sepals, 4-6 petals, petals separate, ovary superior or half-inferior with 1 loci, 1-9 styles, fruits are capsules

-*Claytonia virginica*

Claytonia virginica by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Primulaceae (Primrose Family)

Leaves simple, leaves often serrated, leaves without stipules, flowers grow in clusters on leafless stalks, flowers 5-parted, sepals are distinct but fused at the base, ovary superior, 1 style, fruits are capsules with many seeds

-*Dodecatheon meadia*

Dodecatheon meadia by Rachel Goad, POC Staff



Ranunculaceae (Crowfoot Family)

Thornless, flowers usually perfect, leaves often lobed, flowers sometimes spurred, fruits are achenes, capsules, berries, or utricles, fruits often in capitate clusters

- Thalictrum dioicum**
- Anemone quinquefolia**
- Ranunculus septentrionalis**
- Anemone cylindrica**
- Anemone virginiana**
- Thalictrum dasycarpum**
- Hepatica acutiloba**
- Caltha palustris**
- Anemonella thalictroides**
- Actaea pachypoda**



Thalictrum dasycarpum by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

Rosaceae (Rose family)

Flowers radially symmetrical, petals and sepals often in 5s, stamens arranged in spirals, leaves usually alternate and serrated, leaves often have stipules, flowers regular and perfect with 5 sepals and 5 or 0 petals, 10 stamens, 1 pistil, stems often have prickles or thorns

- Fragaria virginiana**
- Geum canadense**
- Potentilla simplex**
- Potentilla aserina**
- Agrimonia gryposepala**



Fragaria virginiana by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers

Rubiaceae (Madder Family)

Leaves simple with stipules, leaves unlobed, leaves opposite or whorled, flowers perfect, corollas 3-5 lobed, ovary inferior, style with a lobed or capitate stigma

-Galium concinnum

-Galium boreale

Galium concinnum by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Santalaceae (Sandalwood Family)

Leaves unlobed, 4-5 stamens, stamens on a fleshy disc opposite the calyx lobes, ovary has 1 loci, ovary inferior, fruits are 1-seeded

-Comandra umbellata

Comandra umbellata by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Scrophulariaceae (Figwort Family)

Didynamous (pairs of uneven) stamens inserted on a corolla tube, 1 style on a superior ovary that develops into a many-seeded capsule with 2 loci

-Veronicastrum virginicum

-Penstamon digitalis

Veronicastrum virginicum by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Thelypteridaceae (Marsh Fern Family)

Fronds not evergreen, 1-2 pinnately divided leaves, sori round

- **Thelypteris palustris pubescens (Dryopteris thelypteris var. Pubescens)**
- **Thelypteris palustris (Dryopteris thelypteris)**

Thelypteris palustris by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Tofieldiaceae (False Asphodel Family)

Subscapose, 2-ranked linear leaves, flowers usually in clusters of 1-3 in racemes, 6 tepals, 6 stamens, ovary superior, 3 subulate styles, fruit a capsule

- **Triantha glutinosa (Tofieldia glutinosa)**

Triantha glutinosa by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers



Trilliaceae (Trillium Family)

1-2 whorls of leaves, sepals green, 6 stamens, ovary superior, 3 stigmas, fruit a many-seeded berry or a fleshy indehiscent many-seeded capsule

- **Trillium recurvatum**
- **Trillium grandiflorum**

Trillium grandiflorum by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Typhaceae (Cattail Family)

Basal and alternate cauline leaves, leaves linear, sheaths open with overlapping margins, inflorescences solitary, both staminate and pistillate flowers on the same rachis, ovary has 1 loci and 1 style, flowers are spikes maturing into follicles

-*Typha latifolia*

Typha latifolia by John Hirty, Illinois Wildflowers



Urticaceae (Nettle Family)

Simple leaves, inflorescences in racemes, cymes, or panicles, flowers usually imperfect, petals absent, ovary superior, 1 style, fruit an achene

-*Boehmeria cylindrica*

Boehmeria cylindrica by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Verbenaceae (Vervain Family)

Leaves opposite, perianth usually 4 or 5 lobed, usually 4 stamens, ovary with 4 shallow lobes, fruits are schizocarps of 2 or 4 nutlets or drupes

-*Verbena stricta*

Verbena stricta by Jason Miller, POC Staff



Violaceae (Violet Family)

Leaves basal or alternate, leaves have stipules, flowers scapose or axillary, 5 sepals, 5 petals, ovary superior, 5 stamens, fruits usually a capsule with 1 loci

-*Viola sororia*

Viola sororia by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



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