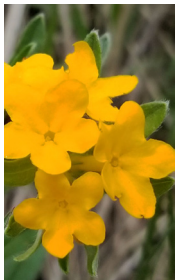


BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Hoary puccoon (*Lithospermum canescens*)

Plant family: Forget-me-not, borage (*Boraginaceae*)



Top: *The showy flowers that bloom first produce infertile seeds. The later-blooming flowers that produce fertile seeds are far more inconspicuous.*

Contributed Photo

Right: *Hoary puccoon foliage and flowers appear on a dry, rocky prairie.*

Photo Credit: Megan Benage, Minnesota DNR



One of the showiest bright-orange flowers on the landscape, hoary puccoon is found throughout dry, native prairies in Minnesota. The word “puccoon” is derived from an Algonquian word for plants that yield dyes: pougkone. Its taproot produces a purple-red sap that was used as a dye. The species is difficult to propagate, so it’s typically unavailable from native plant nurseries. But it plays an important role in remnant prairies, where it benefits from restoration efforts.

Plant Stats

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:UPL

PRIMARY USES: Pollinator food and habitat

Identification

Short-statured hoary puccoon typically grows 6 to 18 inches tall. Typically only one round stem shoots up from the taproot, sometimes branching near the top of the plant.

Leaves are alternate, up to 2½ inches long and a half-inch wide. One prominent vein down the middle narrows to a blunt point at the tip.

Leaves and stems are covered in dense, soft, white hairs; hence the name “hoary.” Flower clusters form at the stem tips, with blooms elongating through the season. Flowers measure a half-inch wide, with five round lobes connected to a tubular base. The showy flowers produced first result in infertile seeds. Later,

inconspicuous, self-pollinating flowers produce fertile seeds (Kittelson and Handler 2006). The genus, *Lithospermum* means “stone seed,” referring to the hard-coated nutlet fruits produced. The nutlets are tear-drop shaped, initially a shiny gray-brown, and then turning cream-colored upon maturity. Each fruit produces a single seed.

Planting Advice

Seed germination is extremely difficult, perhaps because of low viability or unknown methods to break dormancy. Because of its taproot, the plant cannot be divided for propagation — although some report success transplanting taproot cuttings.

Uses

The flowers have nectaries that are attractive to long-tongued bees, skippers and butterflies. The foliage provides a food source for the larvae of a moth species and a long-horned beetle. Because of the difficulty with seed germination, this plant is rarely found in prairie restorations.

Native Americans used the dye produced from the roots to color chewing gum red. The foliage contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids that are toxic to mammals,



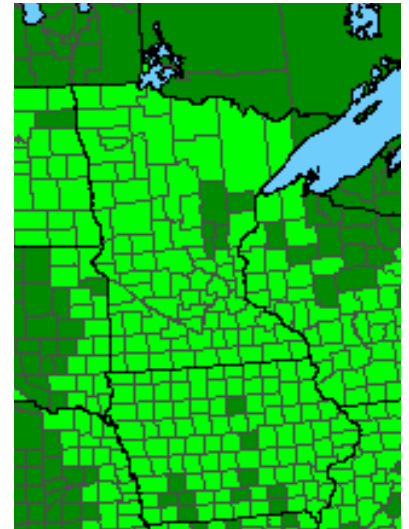
A wild indigo duskywing sips nectar from hoary puccoon.

Photo Credit: MJ Hatfield

causing liver damage if ingested.

Range

Widely distributed in Minnesota, hoary puccoon occurs in sun and part-shade, dry prairies and open woods. Although it grows well in dry soils, it can be found in many different soil types and along woods' edges and openings. Hoary puccoon is an indicator of high-quality, native, tallgrass prairie. The distribution follows the spatial extent of the prairies and Eastern deciduous woodlands.



Range map source: *The Biota of North America Project.* (Note: Shades of green indicate where the species is present.)

Similar Species

Two species from the same genus occur in Minnesota. Carolina (hairy) puccoon (*Lithospermum carolinense*) is the most

similar to hoary puccoon. The flowers of Carolina puccoon are larger, usually 1 inch wide, with shorter, rough hairs

on the leaves. The flowers of fringed (narrow-leaf) puccoon (*Lithospermum incisum*) are yellow with fringed edges.



Left: *Carolina puccoon.* **Photo Credit:** Peter M. Dziuk



Right: *Fringed puccoon.* **Photo Credit:** Katy Chayka

References

Kittelson, P. M., and S. D. Handler. 2006. Genetic diversity in isolated patches of the tallgrass prairie forb, *Lithospermum canescens* (Boraginaceae). *The Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society* 133:513–518.
<http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info>
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Developed by Jessica Petersen