

Glossary of Plant Terms

- Akali (soils):** Soils that have a pH of 8.5 or higher and contain at least 15% exchangeable sodium ions. This threshold level is the point where most plant growth is inhibited.
- Alternate:** Leaf attachment alternates direction along the stem.
- Asymmetrical:** Not symmetrical or alike on both sides of a central line.
- Auricle:** Ear-like appendage that extend laterally at the collar of a grass leaf.
- Awn:** A bristle or nerve that extends from the either the base or the tip of a grass flower part.
- Blade:** The leaf of the plant.
- Bract:** A specialized leaf that is situated at the base of the flower.
- Browse:** Plant parts that are of woody plants such as leaves, stems, shrubs.
- Bulb:** A globular structure, usually under soil, that grows leaves from the top and roots from the bottom.
- Bunchgrass:** A grass that grows in tufts, or bunches. Its roots extend downward and outward from the base of the bunch, but do not sprout laterally like sodgrasses.
- Collar:** In grasses, the junction between the leaf blade and the leaf sheath, which curves around the flowering stalk.
- Compound:** A leaf with a subdivided blade (opposite of a simple leaf).
- Composite:** Separate parts coming together to form a whole.
- Cool Season:** Describes plants that are adapted to climates with winter precipitation and summer drought; they generally grow early in the spring when moisture is present and go dormant when it gets hot and dry.
- Cordate:** Heart- shaped.
- Corm:** An enlarged or bulb-like base of a stem.
- Culm:** The jointed stem or stalk of a plant.
- Cuneate:** Wedge-shaped, triangular at the base and coming to a point.
- Deciduous:** A plant that loses its leaves in the fall and regrows them in the spring.
- Deltoid:** A triangular leaf with the stem inserted in the middle of the base.
- Dichotomous:** Branching by separating into two parts.
- Disk:** A type of flower composed of tubular florets. (i.e., the center of a sunflower is composed of disk flowers)
- Entire:** Leaves with smooth edges that have no notches or indentations.
- Fibrous roots:** Finely divided root system lacking an enlarged central taproot.
- Floret:** A small or reduced flower, especially of grasses. In grasses, the floret is includes the lemma, palea, and reproductive organs.
- Flower:** The reproductive structure of a plant.
- Forage value:** The nutritive value of plants consumed by grazing animals. Varies largely by maturity.
- Forb:** Category of herbaceous flowering plants other than grasses or grass-likes.
- Glume:** A bract, usually two, at the base of a grass spikelet.
- Grass:** Category of herbaceous flowering plants other than grass-likes or forbs.
- Grass-like:** Category of herbaceous flowering plants that look similar to grasses but contain members of the sedge or rush family.
- Head:** A compact section of a plant, usually at the top, such as a seed head.
- Herbaceous:** A non-woody plant with leaves and stems that die back to the ground every year. May have an annual, biennial, or perennial life-cycle.
- Inflorescence:** A floral cluster positioned at the top of a stem (in contrast to a solitary flower).
- Internode:** The space on the stem between two nodes.
- Invasive:** An aggressive and adaptable plant that thrives in areas beyond its natural range and often causes the displacement of native species.
- Jointed:** An articulation on a stem such as a node.
- Lanceolate:** An elongated leaf shape that is shaped like a lance (i.e. narrow at the tip and tapering out towards the base)
- Lemma:** A bract in a grass spikelet just below the stamen and pistil.
- Ligule:** In grasses, a membrane or ring of hairs around the inside of the collar.
- Linear:** A leaf shape that is long and slender.
- Lobe:** Deep rounded indentation/division of a leaf.
- Margin:** The shape of a leaf edge.
- Morphology:** The study of plant structures and forms.
- Naturalized:** A plant that originally came from another region or continent but has been its new region for many decades and is well adapted to the local conditions.

Netted: A type of leaf venation that is branched or netlike.

Node: A joint where leaves, flowers, or branches are attached to a stem.

Noxious: A weed that has been designated “noxious” by law. These deleterious weeds are not native, have potentially harmful or adverse effects, and are difficult to eradicate.

Oblong: A leaf shape that is an elongated circle.

Obovate: A leaf shape that is wide at the top and tapers to a point at the base (like a tear-drop).

Opposite: Stems or leaves growing directly across from one another.

Ovate: A leaf shape that is wide at the base and tapers at the top (egg-shaped).

Palatable (palatability): A plant that is desirable as food to a grazing animal.

Palea: The upper bract of a grass floret that, along with the lemma, encloses the flower of grasses.

Palmate: A leaf shape with many lobes or a branched leaf venation that arises from a point at the base of the leaf.

Panicle: An inflorescence made up of branches of racemes.

Parallel: A type of venation where the veins run parallel to the center vein.

Pinnate: Having leaves or veins arranged along a common axis; feather-like.

Pith: Soft, spongy tissue found in the center of stems.

Pubescent: Covered with dense, short, soft hairs.

Rachis: The main stem/axis of an inflorescence or central stalk of a pinnately compound leaf.

Raceme: An unbranched inflorescence with a main axis and flowers attached on short stalks.

Rhizome: An underground stem that has scales for leaves and joints where new stems arise above ground.

Ray: A type of flower that has marginal florets surrounding tubular florets (i.e. the yellow “petals” of a sunflower).

Rush: A grass-like herbaceous plant in the *Juncus* genus that has slender solid stems and are found in riparian landscapes.

Scalloped: A type of leaf margin with edges having large rounded indentations.

Sedge: An herbaceous grass-like plant in the *Carex* genus characterized by solid triangular stems. Commonly found in riparian landscapes.

Serrate: A leaf margin with edges like the teeth of a saw.

Seedhead: See *inflorescence*.

Sheath: The base of the leaf that vertically envelops the stem.

Shrub: A woody, low growing plant or bush with several trunks.

Simple: A leaf or stem that is not divided into multiple parts.

Sodgrass (Sod-forming grass): A grass that forms a dense mat of interwoven roots by sending out stolons or rhizomes.

Spike: A type of inflorescence where the flowers develop directly from the main axis.

Spikelet: An arrangement of one or more florets subtended by glumes.

Stem: The aboveground stalk of a plant that supports the flowers, leaves, or branches and transports water and nutrients from the roots.

Steppe: A grassland landscape lacking trees or a region with a climate too dry to support a forest and too moist to be a desert.

Stolon: A horizontal stem/branch of a plant that produces new growth.

Symmetrical: Something that is dividable at least once and producing two similar/equal pieces.

Taproot: A single enlarged root that produces small lateral roots.

Toothed: A leaf margin with jagged edges.

Tree: A woody plant with a large main trunk; generally refers to species that grow more than 20 feet tall.

Tuberous: A modified root structure that stores nutrients (i.e., sweet potato).

Umbel: An umbrella-like inflorescence with multiple flower stalks that spread out from a common center (i.e., dandelion).

Venation (Veins): The arrangement and distribution of veins in a leaf that send nutrients throughout the plant.

Vernation: The arrangement of the young leaves within a bud (i.e., folded, rolled, or circinate).

Whorled: Leaves (3 or more) arranged in a whorled or circular pattern on the stem, arising from the same node.