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Prairie turnip

Pediomelum esculentum (Pursh) Rydb.

historical and modern use, propagation,
and management of a new crop

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The prairie turnip (*Pediomelum esculentum* (Pursh) Rydb. [Fabaceae]) is a legume that was traditionally used by American Indians indigenous to the Great Plains. Roots of these perennial legumes provided a valuable source of proteins, minerals, and carbohydrates to native tribes of the region. Although prairie turnips are, and were, primarily gathered from the wild, they have potential to provide a new and valuable crop for gardeners and commercial producers. They are still used to a limited extent in the diets of many of the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains. We examined methods of seed collection, germination, and cultivation. These hardy legumes performed best when directly seeded into the garden during the early spring. Prairie turnips can be readily cultivated in a manner similar to other root crops; however, they require a 3- to 4-y rotation to reach peak production. Irrigation is not required after seed germination and establishment, but it can be used to increase yields in drier climates.

Stahnke A, Hayes M, Meyer K, Witt K, Weideman J, Fernando AP, Burrows R, Reese RN. 2008. Prairie turnip *Pediomelum esculentum* (Pursh) Rydb.: historical and modern use, propagation, and management of a new crop. *Native Plants Journal* 9(1):46–58.

KEY WORDS

Psoralea esculentum, Fabaceae, seed collection, seed germination, planting schedule, nutrition, ethnobotany, breadroot

NOMENCLATURE

USDA NRCS (2007)

Figure 1. Prairie turnip plant growing at the South Dakota State University Oak Lake Field Station in Brookings County, South Dakota.

Photo by April Stahnke