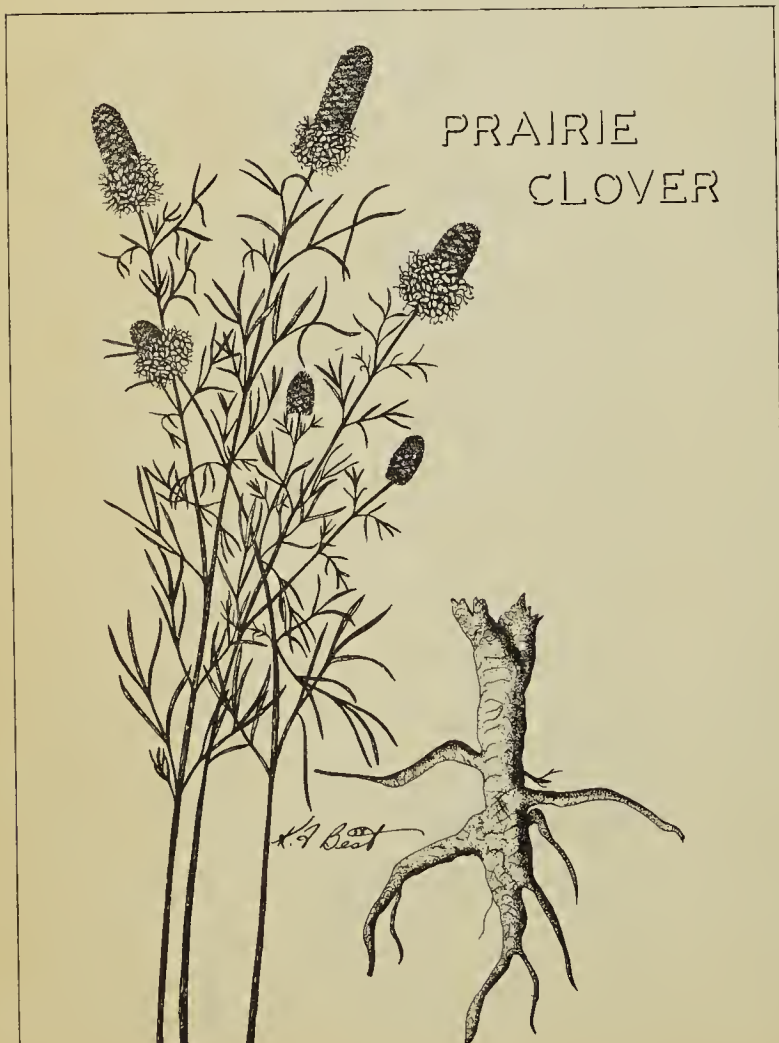


Edible Plants of Saskatchewan

By **Keith Best** and **Archie Budd**, Swift Current, Sask.

Continuing our discussion on edible roots, we turn again to the Legume family. The roots of all the members of the *Petalostemon* or *Prairie Clover* genus are edible. We have three or four species, two of which are quite plentiful on the prairies, especially on drier hillsides, the purple-flowered (*P. purpureus*) and the white-flowered (*P. candidus*). They are low-growing herbs with small, odd pinnate leaves and tiny flowers, borne in dense spikes from one to two inches long, the lower flowers generally opening first. The purple-flowered as a rule grows somewhat more erect than the more prostrate white-flowered species. The roots were chewed or eaten raw and the leaves were al-



so used by the Indians to make a tea-like drink.

Returning again to the Carrot family, we must not fail to mention the *Osmorhiza* or *Sweet Cicely* genus of which we can find three species in shady woodlands. These plants bear umbels of a few white flowers and later on have linear, bristly fruit. The roots are edible by humans and were used by the Indians; and the entire plant, roots and foliage, is very palatable to livestock.

The *Puccoons* or *Lithospermum* genus, of which we have two common species, belong to the *Boraginaceae* or *Borage* family. They are herbs up to 18 inches high with narrow, alternate leaves up to two

NARROW-LEAVED PUCCOON



inches long. The flowers are salverform, from a half to one inch long, yellow in colour and with a long tube, and flaring out at the top. The fruit are white nutlets about an eighth of an inch long and are very hard, giving the generic name of *Lithospermum* meaning "stone seed". The roots are coarse and fleshy and were eaten boiled or roasted by the natives. Occasionally the leaves were also eaten.

Finally, in our discussion of plants with edible roots, we come to the perennial sunflowers, many of which bear tubers or fleshy roots. These plants are so well known that description is quite unnecessary. The best known, of course, is the Jerusalem Artichoke which is not found in Saskat-

chewan, but is in southeastern Manitoba. We do have, however, Narrow-leaved Sunflower (*Helianthus Maximiliani*) which provided an edible root for the Indians, as did probably the Clustered, the Beautiful and the Tuberous-rooted Sunflowers. The Narrow-leaved is found as far west as Swift Current. Generally its leaves are folded lengthwise. Not only were the sunflower tubers found edible but also the fruit, or sunflower "seeds" so popular today. There are many more plants bearing edible roots but we think we have mentioned a sufficient number to show that it was by no means difficult for the early inhabitants of this country to obtain much variation in their diet.



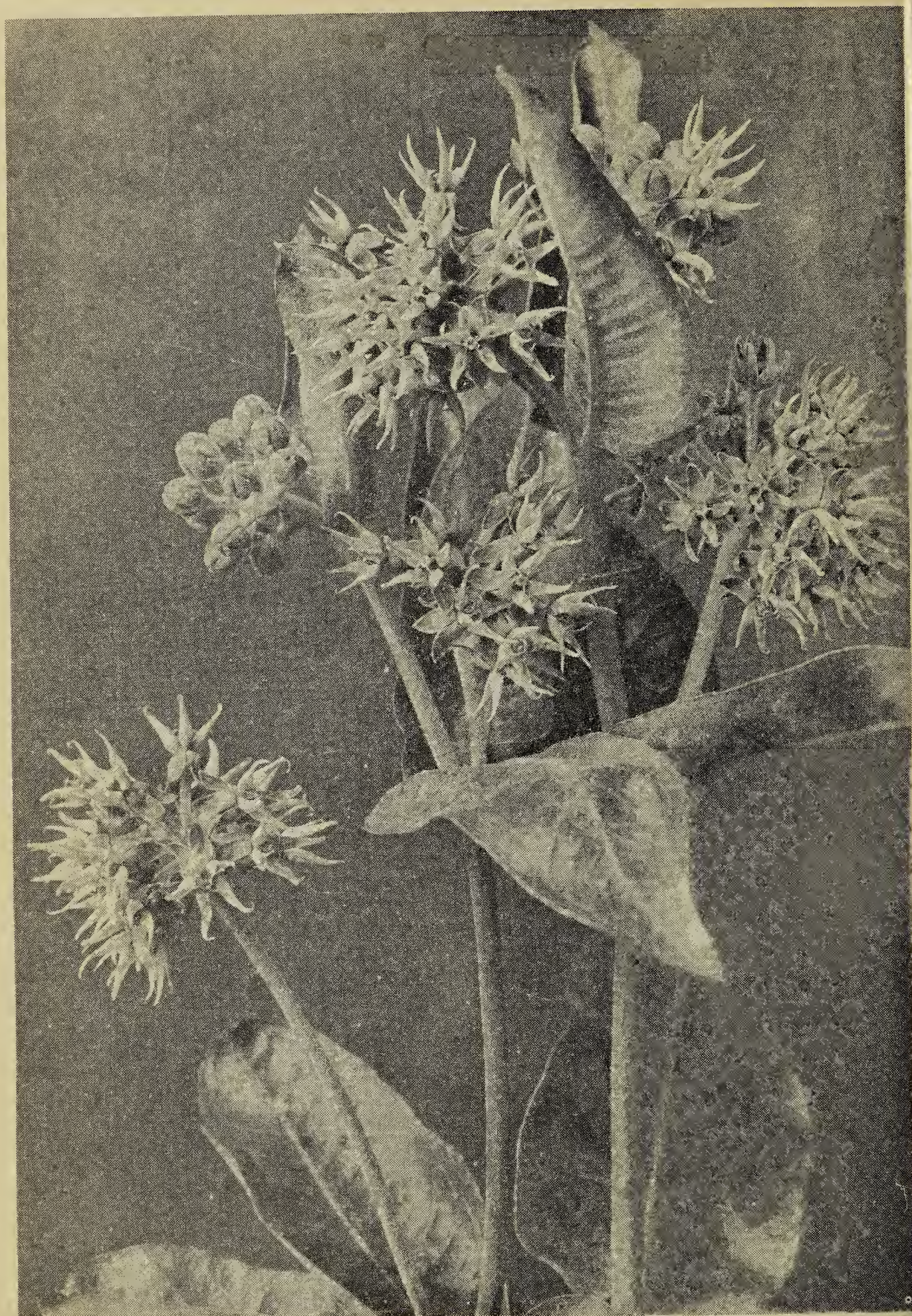


Photo by W. C. McCalla

SHOWY MILKWEED
Asclepias speciosa Torrey

A lusty perennial, stems 2½ to 3 feet high, often massed in large colonies.
(½ nat. size.)