

Sphagnum moss in a muskeg site. Kasmere L. 3661.

Linnaea borealis L. var. *americana* (Forbes) Rehd. On a wooded esker. Fort Hall L. 3735.

Viburnum edule (Michx.) Raf. Gravelly hillside. Kasmere L. 3628.

Erigeron angulosus Gaud. var. *kamtschaticus* (DC.) Hara Sandy shore. Fort Hall L. 3708.

Petasites sagittatus (Pursh) Gray Moist forest site. Lac Brochet 3668, 3671.

Arnica alpina (L.) Olin subsp. *attenuata* (Greene) Maguire North-

ern slope of rocky hillside. Fort Hall. L. 3685.

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BALSAMROOT

by Keith F. Best, Swift Current

Balsamroot, *Balsamorhiza sagittata* (Pursh) Nutt., a tufted perennial of the sunflower family, gets both its common and scientific name from its thick, resinous (balsamlike) roots (rhiza, root) and its arrow-shaped (sagittate) leaves. Known also as Arrowleaf Balsamroot, and as Indian breadroot, this plant extends from British Columbia eastward into Saskatchewan. On many of the foothill ranges it is one of the dominant weed species, often growing in almost pure stands and commonly making up a large portion of the plant cover. It is found on well-drained soils and open, fairly dry areas such as south-facing ridges, and open sunny slopes.

Balsamroot begins growth and produces its bright yellow flowers early in the season. On native range land where plentiful, it serves as a reliable indicator of pasture readiness, as the range is generally suitable for grazing by the time that the majority of the plants are in full flower. They are valuable on spring pastures as they are fairly palatable to all classes of livestock.

Usually the seeds ripen and the leaves dry up during midsummer, but on moist sites and at higher elevations, this does not occur until late summer. Reproduction is entirely by seed which is produced in fairly large quantities. The weed is not very aggressive mainly owing to the low viability of its seed and the grazing of the flowers by livestock.

The strong, deep perennial roots enable balsamroot to withstand heavy trampling and close grazing remarkably well. These roots are often over two inches thick and exude a balsam or sticky substance with a turpentine-like odor. They have a thin corky bark and a fibrous, yellowish centre, and were used by the Indians for food.



Drawing by K. F. Best

Balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*)