

Breadroot Scurfpea (*Psoralea esculenta*):

This plant was more commonly known as Tipisin, Indian Breadroot, prairie potato or prairie turnip. The Metis called it “pomme blanche” or “pomme de prairie.” The plant has a purple flower and a white, starchy root. This plant was probably the most important wild food gathered on the prairies.

It grows in high places on the prairies and in open woodlands. By July or August, the leaves and stem break off and are blown away by the wind. They are dug just before the tops are gone. They were unearthed with a slender digging stick three or four feet long. These sticks were cut obliquely at the lower end to form a sharp edge, and the single plane surface sharpened to a point.

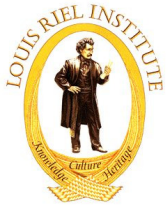
Tipisina bulbs were eaten raw, boiled whole in soups when fresh, or dried and later boiled or pounded into flour which could later be used as soup thickening. Also known as “tipsin” or “Indian breadroot”, breadroot scurf pea usually begins to bloom on the Dakota and Canadian prairies during the first week in June. The plant can be found on plains and grassy hills from the Northwest Territories to Texas.

Breadroot scurf pea is a hairy perennial plant up to a foot tall. One to several stems arise at ground level from a thick brown root. Three to four inches below ground, the root forms a tuber-like body up to three inches long and an inch wide. Each leaf is divided into five leaflets. About 20-30 bluish-purple flowers are found in clusters about 2-4 inches long at the top of the plant. Legumes (pods) are flat and have a long slender tip.



Cattle do not have much effect on the abundance of breadroot scurf pea. The plant likes dry soil. The starchy, thickened roots of this plant were a staple in the diet of many Aboriginal North Americans, and were also eaten by the early voyagers as the “pomme de prairie” and later by many European immigrants. It has often been suggested that the plant be commercially grown.

Breadroot scurf pea is a member of the large and economically important bean family, which includes alfalfas, peas, clovers, peanuts and trees such as caragana and locust. The generic name *Psoralea* stems from the Greek *psoraleos*, "scabby," concerning the glandular dots or "scurf" on the leaves. The specific epithet *esculenta* means "edible" in botanical Latin. The renowned German botanist Frederick Pursh first described this species for science in 1814. Pursh was the first to publish upon the many plants brought back from the western wilderness by Lewis and Clark.



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