

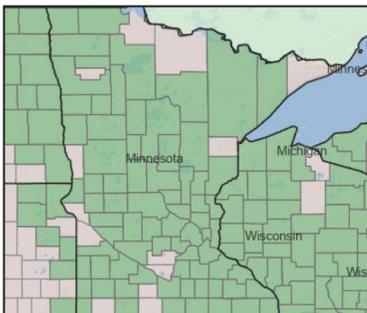
# Red columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)

**Family:**  
**Ranunculaceae**  
**(Buttercup)**

**DESCRIPTION:** A popular plant in woodland gardens, shady stormwater plantings and restoration projects, red columbine can tolerate a wide range of soils and light conditions. It grows in habitats ranging from rock outcrops and bluff prairies to oak forests. The red-and-yellow flowers bloom from May to July, providing an early spring food source for pollinators.

**USES:** Attractive and easy to grow, it makes a great garden addition, and does well in shade and spots low in nutrients. Ruby-throated hummingbirds and bumblebees collect its nectar. Short-tongued bees and bumblebees collect pollen from its long stamens. The plant is a larval host for the **columbine duskywing butterfly** (pictured) and the columbine borer moth.

**REFERENCES:**  
[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)  
[Minnesota State Horticultural Society](#)  
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)  
[Missouri Botanical Garden](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



## Planting Recommendations

Plants prefer light to medium shade and moist soil, but tolerate a wide range of conditions as long as there is good drainage. Seeds are easily collected from plants or purchased from native seed suppliers and nurseries. Seeds should be sown on a weed-free surface in the fall. That allows for a period of cold moist stratification over the winter to break the seed coat, allowing plants to germinate in the spring. To

break dormancy artificially, refrigerate damp seeds for at least 60 days. Plants also can be transplanted from clumps in early spring or planted from containers. Under ideal growing conditions, the plants naturally form large colonies. Deadheading (a form of pruning) will encourage additional blooms. Good companion plants include wild blue phlox, wild geraniums, lady ferns, Sprengel's sedge, wild strawberries and violets.

**Developed by Dan Shaw**, BWSR senior ecologist and vegetation specialist, and an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota



Photo Credit: Marcie O'Connor, [Prairie Haven blog](#)

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:**  
GP: FAC  
MW: FACU  
NCNE: FACU

**ID:** Plants grow up to 3 feet tall, with fibrous roots that sometimes spread via rhizomes. Leaves are alternate and compound with three rounded leaflets that grow up to 3 inches long and wide. Flowers are made up of five yellow petals surrounded by five red petal-like sepals. Each flower grows up to 2 inches long and hangs downward. Five pod-shaped capsules contain the seeds.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** The compound and rounded leaves of early meadow rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*) are similar to red columbine, but early meadow rue has longer stalks. Early meadow rue flowers also have drooping yellow stamens in bunches, but the flowers lack petals.