Native Plant of the Month

Common Camas
Camassia quamash

- Lewis & Clark recorded camas in their journals as “quawmash,” a native name now applied to its scientific name.
- They wrote: “The quawmash is now in blume and from the color of its blume at a short distance it resembles lakes of fine clear water...,” indicating its abundance.
- Only a few remnant patches of this once plentiful plant remain in the Puget Sound area.
- Native people relied on this plant as a primary food source, though the bulbs require special processing to be edible.

Landscape Value

This lily plant prefers wet soil in winter and dry soil in summer, making it ideal for seeps and wet meadows. It thrives in a sunny meadow area with rich soil, and can take the drought conditions of our Northwest summers.

Plant with native grasses such as Roemer’s fescue, junegrass, and tufted hairgrass, and in the company of other herbaceous native plants such as chocolate lily, yarrow, wild hyacinth, nodding onion and wild strawberry. Camas self-seeds readily in natural gardens.

Camas bulbs are widely available from national sources, but look locally for our Washington native varieties.

Text by Heidi Bohan
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