Blue Eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium* sp. and *Olsynium* sp.)
Iris Family

**Why Choose It?**

Plant names can be confusing, whether they are common names or scientific names, and blue eyed grass may be in the running for one of the most confusing. First, it is not a grass at all, but actually a very dainty and charming member of the Iris family. Then, it isn't always blue. Its grass-like leaves surround the 6-petaled (actually the petals are called ‘tepals’) star shaped flowers which can be blue, yellow or, in one related species, purplish-pink.

**In the Garden**

All of the *Sisyrinchiums* are good candidates for natural areas of the garden, edging, or moist rock gardens. They also make good container plants, either on their own or combined with other smallish perennials, such as native Saxifrages or spreading phlox (*Phlox diffusa*).

**The Facts**

All of the *Sisyrinchiums* prefer to grow in a sunny location, and require spring moisture. Some are suitable for wet, even boggy conditions. *Olsynium douglasii*, or purple eyed grass, is the most drought tolerant of the species. These diminutive plants are spring bloomers, and purple eyed grass can bloom as early as March, while yellow eyed grass blooms somewhat later, but continues on and off through June and July. If they are very happy where they are planted they may self-sow, but you can also propagate them easily by division.

**Where to See It**

The *Sisyrinchiums* are fairly common along the west coast from British Columbia south to California, and east of the Cascades into Idaho. *Olsynium douglasii*, sometimes called satin flower, or purple eyed grass, grows mainly on the drier east side of the mountains, but is also found on the Olympic Peninsula and in the San Juans.
And who was Douglas anyway?

Olsynium douglasii or purple eyed grass was named for David Douglas, a very prolific botanist who lived from 1799 to 1834. In his short life he was responsible for introducing into cultivation hundreds of Pacific Northwest native plants. He died in Hawaii, in mysterious circumstances, at the age of 35.

You can find out more information about native plants, including where to buy them, from the Washington Native Plant Society.

www.wnps.org
206-527-3210 or 1-888-288-8022

Olsynium douglasii. Photo: Ben Legler

Native Plant Spotlights

Adapted from writing by Cynthia Spurgeon
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