



About Our Cover

On our cover is the blue or purple camas (*Camassia quamash*), also known as camas lily, quamash, small camas, and by several other common names. Native to western North America, the camas is a perennial monocot with pale to deep blue-violet flowers. Although traditionally classified as part of the lily family, several lines of evidence now suggest that these plants may be part of the family Agavaceae.

Camas plants are between 30 and 100 cm in height, with basal grass-like leaves and flowers arranged in a raceme at the top of the plant that bloom from April to June. Flowers are star-shaped and radially symmetrical with 6 petals and 6 long filaments with brilliant yellow anthers. Camas grows in lightly shaded forests, moist hill-sides, streamsides, rock outcrops, bluffs, and wet meadows or prairies.

The name of the plant appears to come from *qémés*, the Native American Nez Perce term for the bulb. The bulbs of camas served as a widely traded food source for western Native Americans who harvested the bulbs, predominantly after flowering, and appear to have prepared them in several ways, for example by drying and pounding them into a flour and either pit roasting or boiling. Boiling the bulbs apparently produces a molasses-like syrup. *Camassia* should not be confused with the white-flowered "death camas" of the genus *Zigadenus*, which grows in the same area and is toxic.

This photograph was taken by Roy Rea of the University of Northern British Columbia in Beacon Hill Park on Vancouver Island, where camas grows in large violet patches and lives in close association with Garry oak woodland meadows.

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