

Indian Camas

Camassia quamash

(kuh-MAS-ee-uh KWA-mash)

Other Names: Common camas, Swamp Segoe, Small Camas, Indian or Wild hyacinth

Type: Bulbous herbaceous

Life Cycle: Perennial

Family: Lily

Planting: 4-6 inches deep, in groups 9



Photo by & grown by: John Brandauer

Description: Native to western North America, and occasionally so abundant entire meadows can appear like lakes from a distance. On the Lewis and Clark expedition Lewis, after seeing the blooms wrote, "*resembles lakes of fine clear water*" (Lewis journal, June 12, 1806). Prepared bulbs are edible, and were used as a staple food source by Native Americans, roasted and eaten. After roasting some was ground as flour and baked as bread, which could be sun dried and stored for winter. The name Quamash is from the northwest Native American word for the bulb *qém'es*.

Blooms: Six petaled strikingly attractive spires of blue violet, in late April to early May for us. The grass like foliage goes dormant after June.

Native Status: USA: CA, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

Light Requirements: Full sun, does best in full sun, tolerates light shade

Soil Preference: Well drained with high humus content best, but will tolerate clay. Can be planted at the edge of a pond IF bulbs are kept above the waterline. 6.6 to 7.8 pH

Care: Easy, ample moisture in spring can dry out in summer

Growth Rate: Slow, from seed. **Size:** 18 to 24 inches

Natural habitat: Areas, which are moist in spring meadows, low area on prairies, alongside streams.

Wildlife Benefits: Attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds as a nectar source. Bees will collect pollen as well as nectar.

Propagation Methods: Best by division, in fall. Seeds require cold stratification, germination is poor, and seedlings take 3-4 years to bloom.

Commercial availability: Although named cultivars exist this plant is not readily available, but worth searching for. Try Brent & Becky's bulbs @

<http://www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com/>

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Information compiled from the web, supplemented by our experiences.

<http://www.weedsforwildlife.com/> John and Susan Brandauer <mailto:jbrandauer@optonline.net>