

The Oregonian, March 27, 2003, Homes & Gardens of the Northwest

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**GLOBE-TROTTERS**\_Summary: Europeans love the tough native bulbs we ignore

The emergence of glorious bulbs from Mediterranean lands half a world away heralds spring in our own back yard. But while welcoming crocuses, daffodils and tulips, we've ignored native bulbs, all perfectly suited to a wet winter/dry summer climate. Few gardens of the Northwest cultivate them. Meanwhile, Europeans have taken a shine to our native bulbs, propagating and planting plenty of them. Native bulb expert Jane McGary can't explain it. "Why isn't everybody growing camas?" she wonders about one of the easiest natives for our yards. She grows them and dozens of others in her Estacada garden.

McGary points out many garden-worthy natives in the book she edited, "Bulbs of North America," the first to focus on our continent's native bulbs.

We couldn't be luckier. The West Coast is home to the majority of North America's bulbous species, a rainbow of camas, fritillaries, trilliums, lilies, native onions, dog's tooth violets and many others. All thrive in wet winters and springs, then sleep through summer drought.

Because plants need water and light to grow, it makes sense that Northwest native bulbs bloom primarily from late winter to early summer, when rain is plentiful and trees and shrubs aren't fully leafed out. "Don't expect much from June on," says Parker Sanderson, co-owner of Cistus Design Nursery on Sauvie Island, adding that most summer bloomers such as fritillaries or lilies come from Northern Europe and China.

In fact, many native bulbs will simply rot away if watered in summer. "The difference between natives and hybrids is that hybrids can tolerate summer water," Sanderson says.

But just because a plant suits the climate is not reason enough to include it in the garden. Fortunately, there are plenty of other reasons.

Natives are not only beautiful, they can give gardens something hybrids often cannot: delicacy and movement. Traditionally, hybridizers have worked for large flowers, which need thick stems to support them. Natives, on the other hand, usually have simpler blossoms on more flexible stalks. By mixing in natives, gardens can be both flashy and subtle.

Northwest native bulbs also remind us there's no place like home.

"Native plants often give us that sense of place," says retired biologist Loren Russell of Corvallis. Darwin tulips, for example, grow coast to coast and you might as well be looking at a garden in Indianapolis as in Portland. But few places are home to *Camassia leichtlinii*.

See camas fields and know you are in or near the Northwest, where camas can survive and prosper.

Planting native bulbs also supports plant diversity. As human habitat expands, plant habitat shrinks. "By growing native bulbs in our gardens, we can keep these species alive," McGary says.

Yet natives can be difficult to find. Not many suppliers grow for a summer-drought climate, Sanderson says. But here's where individuals can really make a difference: The more people want the bulbs and let nurseries know, the more incentive growers will have to produce them.

When buying natives, make sure your source does not dig plants in the wild. Besides the obvious risk of extinction, a bulb growing in the wild will not necessarily grow 50 or 60 miles away. Taking a living thing from its habitat can kill it. Reputable sources usually propagate bulbs from seed, which takes three to five years, so bulbs seem relatively expensive.

The native bulbs listed are easy to grow in a typical plot, but they're just the start. Since many grow naturally in woodlands or their edges, they also adapt beautifully in a shrub border or shady area. They can provide an early, colorful cushion under evergreen shrubs that are often posted

starkly around houses. Under trees, native bulbs will happily colonize undisturbed. Many more are suited for containers, troughs and rock gardens; the choice is vast.

"The best piece of gardening advice I ever got," McGary says, "is, 'Try everything.' "

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UNLESS MARKED, PLANT ALL THESE NATIVE BULBS IN FALL; OCTOBER IS IDEAL.

*Fritillaria affinis* syn. *F. lanceolata* (fritillary)

Tall and sometimes checkered, fritillarias settle in under trees and shrubs and can be found from San Luis Obispo County in California into British Columbia. Highly variable bloom color, but locally, it is dark purple, often checkered, with as many as six nodding bells per 18- to 24-inch stem. Plant in moist, humusy, well-drained soil in shade. Warning: Deer find them delicious.

\* *Trillium* (wakerobin)

Each three-leafed stem has one flower with three sepals and three petals, which explains the Latin name. The blooms herald the robins' return, hence the common name. They grow coast to coast, so purchase those suited to dry summers, not Eastern varieties that need wetter ones. Unlike most bulbs, buy these potted and in leaf, usually in spring. \*Plant then. They're expensive because seed to bloom can take eight years. Plant in partial shade in rich, humusy soil. Leave undisturbed to establish clumps. Top-dress annually with leaf or bark mulch. Don't worry when leaves die in the heat; they'll return with moisture.

*T. chloropetalum* (giant trillium)

Resembles a water lily with mottled leaves and erect flowers. Found along the coast from California to Washington. Colors vary, but usually white in Oregon and commonly pink, deep red or purple in San Francisco. Makes big clumps to 16 inches tall in fertile soil.

*T. ovatum* (winter trillium/wakerobin)

White flowers and bright green leaves; to 20 inches tall.

*T. rivale* (Klamath trillium)

Will make big clumps when happy. Dainty, red-spotted flowers of white or pale pink nod as they mature; about 8 inches tall.

*Veratrum californicum* (false hellebore)

More "canna meets cornstalk" than "false hellebore." Native to moist mountain meadows and lower elevations, these make spectacular specimens in a border. Emerging foliage is pleated, and leaves grow to 10 inches long, with huge panicles of long-lasting, off-white flowers. Variegated and solid forms exist. When plant goes dormant in late summer, be prepared to plant something in its spot. All parts are toxic. Planting is not for the faint of back: bulbs can be the size of bowling balls. Plant in sun in rich, moist soil; to 6 feet tall.

*Erythronium* (dog's tooth violet)

Easy to grow and commonly available, the nodding flowers grow in small clusters. "Violet" is a misnomer because *Erythroniums* are in the lily family, and they look it. But "dog's tooth" describes the thin, curved bulbs perfectly. Grows coast to coast, but Western varieties are best, thriving in woodlands or in partial or light shade with moist, humusy, well-drained soil. Also can grow under conifers. Plant 6 inches deep and then do not disturb, just add leaf mulch or wood mulch annually.

*E. oregonum* (Oregon trout lily)

Grows from British Columbia to Southern Oregon in a wide range of situations. Has as many as three pink or white flowers (cream-colored in the Willamette Valley) and extravagantly brown- or purple-mottled, oblong leaves. Will self-sow to create a carpet. Foliage dies down by early June; to 16 inches tall.

*E. revolutum* (coast fawn lily, trout lily)

Stems have two silver- or dark-mottled leaves with blooms that range from dark pink to magenta or purple, with contrasting yellow or dark center. Grows on the coastal strip from British Columbia to California; to 16 inches tall.

*E. tuolumnense* and hybrids

Native only to Tuolumne County, Calif., it is easy to grow in the Northwest. Bright-green foliage and lemon-yellow flowers can number four per stem; to 12 inches tall.

*Camassia* (camas)

Blooms start from the bottom up as spires of starry flowers with brilliant-yellow stamens. Has narrow, grasslike leaves. Likes heavy, moist, well-drained soil and thrives near tree or shrub roots; also found in rough grasslands. Plant in September or October about 4 inches deep, 8 inches apart. Of the four natives, three are garden-worthy.

*C. cusickii* (Cusick's camas)

The only clumping camas (foliage looks like daylilies or yuccas), it is native to mountain areas and has large, pale-gray flowers on stems to 4 feet tall. Use as a specimen.

*C. leichtlinii* (great camas) and *C. quamash* (common camas)

Often grow together in low-elevation wetlands and closely resemble each other. *C. leichtlinii* is larger (more than 4 feet tall) with paler flowers. *C. quamash* makes a nice cut flower, with rich purple-blue blooms. Plant in masses of a dozen or more. See *C. leichtlinii* var. *leichtlinii* blooming near Roseburg along Interstate 5 in April.

*Zigadenus* (death camas)

Native to open, mountain habitats, these resemble camas but have hairy leaves. All parts are poisonous. Grow in moist, peaty soil in sun. Both can reach more than 3 feet tall.

*Z. elegans*

White flowers about 3/4-inch wide with a greenish-yellow scallop at the center. Found in subalpine meadows and moist rocky areas of the Olympic and Wallowa Mountains, and Steens Mountain.

*Z. fremontii*

Found in Southern Oregon and much of Western California. Pale yellow flowers.

*Lilium* (lily)

A wide variety grow in Southwestern Oregon in highly disparate environments. Don't let that fool you into thinking they're easy. Many challenge the home gardener, largely because they require extremely dry summer soil and prefer protection from afternoon sun.

*L. pardalinum* (leopard lily)

Grows near streams on the coast from Southern Oregon to San Diego. Has several large, recurved, yellow or orange-red flowers with darker-red tips and brown spots on each arching stem. Easy to grow well-drained soil with adequate moisture. Multiplies rapidly. Dig and divide rhizomes every three to four years. Prefers shade at its feet and sun at its head; to 7 feet tall.

*L. parvum* (alpine lily)

Small, high-elevation species that grows along riverbanks and snowmelt areas from California's Sierra Nevada range to the Cascades in Southern Oregon. Bell-shaped flowers come in yellow, orange, pink and red, depending on elevation. Needs excellent drainage and a drier site because it would be under snow and relatively dry during winter in the wild. Plant in sandy humus soil; up to 5 feet tall.

Triteleia, also called Brodiaea

Part of the amaryllis family, flowers resemble certain alliums, with star-shaped blooms in umbels on top of a bare stem. "Triteleia" refers in part to the structure and the flower parts in threes. Needs excellent drainage and dried-out soil in summer. Plant corms about 3 inches deep. Leaves brown when they flower, so pair with low growers whose foliage will hide theirs and that they can climb through. Sun

T. ixioides

Yellow with purple or brown stripes and umbels about 4 inches wide; can reach more than 1 foot tall.

T. laxa

Best-known triteleia for gardens with funnel-shaped, inch-wide flowers, deep blue to purple to white. Umbels can reach 6 inches wide on 10- to 30-inch-tall stems.

T. dichelostemma ida-maia (Firecracker Flower)

Widely available. Its Wild West pedigree is evident in its unusual name, after "Ida May," a stagecoach driver's daughter said to have directed an early botanist to the plant. Hummingbirds love its long-blooming bright red tubular flowers, which bloom on foot-long stems.

Allium cernuum (nodding onion)

Grows in open areas throughout the United States and has a distinctive crooked neck and nodding flower clusters of white, pink or rose-purple. Plant in fall in well-drained soil. Cut seed heads off before they ripen or it will self-sow profusely. Can take some summer water, but the less the better because alliums can be invasive. Blends well with shrubs. Sun or partial shade; 12-15 inches tall.\_