Camas Lilies or Wild Hyacinth

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Wild Hyacinth or Eastern Camas Lily (*Camassia scilloides*) is native to Virginia, mainly west of the Blue Ridge. It is the only Camassia species native to Eastern North America.

The edible bulbs were a vital staple for some Indigenous Peoples and early European Settlers. During the 19th-century Lewis and Clark expedition, the bulbs prevented starvation among the explorers when food was scarce. However, foraging Camas Lily bulbs is strongly discouraged unless you are a trained foraging expert. The bulbs are almost identical to, and often share the same habitat as, deadly Death Camas (*Toxicoscordion nuttallii*) in the wild. Safe harvesting requires observing the flowers to avoid this possibly fatal mistake. For this reason, gardeners should treat any Camas Lily plant strictly as an ornamental garden feature.

Wild Hyacinth is in the Lily family and is an ephemeral. Spring blooms are star-shaped, pale blue flowers that progress toward the top of the spike-like raceme. Camas Lily thrives in full sun and open shade, such as a woodland edge. It prefers rich, acidic soils, but can tolerate clay soils with adequate moisture. You can plant ornamental Camas Lily bulbs in the Fall. Several *Camassia scilloides* bulbs have been planted in the Kitchen Garden bed at the Powhatan Historic Garden to add another historic plant to our collection, added for their Spring blooms rather than food.



Photo courtesy of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

References:

https://www.gardenia.net/genus/camassia-camas
https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/camassia-scilloides/