

Trecanna's Choice



Trecanna Nursery is a family-run plant nursery owned by Mark & Karen Wash and set on Cornish slopes of the Tamar Valley, specialising in unusual bulbs & perennials, Crocosmias and other South African plants, and Sempervivums. Each month Mark will write a feature on some of his very favourite plants.

Trecanna Nursery is open on Fridays & Saturdays throughout the year, from 10am to 5pm, (or phone to arrange a visit at other times). During October, there will be a host of fresh bulbs and late flowering herbaceous perennials ready for sale. Bulbs can also be posted – send an SAE for a list. A wide collection of Crocosmia are now being divided and a new list will be available soon. Trecanna Nursery is located approx. 2 miles north of Gunnislake. Follow the signs from opposite the Donkey Park on the A390, Callington to Gunnislake road. Tel: 01822 834680. Email: mark@trecanna.com

‘True Blue Camassias’

Amongst the wide range of plants and bulbs that we see here at the nursery over the course of the year, a number stand out and perform so well in the local climate that we are encouraged to search out more varieties. One such genus that has caught our attention over the past few years is the relatively little-known ‘Camassia’.

Camassias originate in North America and Canada - they grow in damp open grassland where they carry local names of *Quamash*, or *Bears Grass*. In places they fill the meadows with their hues of blue and white, very much resembling our own swathes of native bluebells. In the wild they were not just valued for their beauty – the bulbs were gathered by the North American Indians who cooked and used them as part of their staple diet.

Camassias produce elegant spires of pale to deep blue or white flowers in late Spring - perfect timing as this is just after most daffodils have faded and are best described as resembling delicate delphiniums. Each individual flower is made up of six slender petals formed into an open star shape, with prominent slender anthers and stigmas, often extending out almost as far as the petals. Each raceme can vary in height from 10 to 36” tall and contains up to 50 blooms that open gradually over a period of weeks. The bottom ones open first and are followed by new tiers each day or two, working up the stem. The leaves are slender and somewhat fleshy, but not untidy like many other bulbs.

As well as providing an outstanding garden display, Camassias also make excellent cut flowers – their erect stems sit proud in a tall vase and last really well.

WHERE AND HOW TO PLANT THEM

The real bonus is that Camassias are easy to grow and seem to love our West Country climate. They can be planted in borders where clumps will punctuate the planting and add height early in the year, well before most herbaceous plants are in full glory. They also make superb plants to grow in meadow grass, orchards, uncut lawns or wild areas. Grow them in sun or part-shade and sheltered from strong wind where the bulbs will multiply and often self-seed to form drifts of colour. Whilst they seem to prefer moist conditions, they do not want to sit in water-logged soil. Indeed we have been surprised to find that they have produced outstanding results even in dry soil. We have also found that they can also be happily grown in containers – use a rich, moisture-retentive compost, and split the clumps every few years.

Camassias can be planted as dry bulbs any time from September to November, or plant growing clumps in early Spring. Plant the bulbs 4-6” deep except for *Camassia quamash* which should be planted 3” deep. A mulch in the winter helps to protect the young shoots from frost although the bulbs are perfectly hardy.

THE PICK OF THE BUNCH

If you’ve never tried Camassias in your own garden I urge you to try just a few bulbs - you will not be disappointed. Here are a few suggestions from some of our favourites:

Camassia cusickii

An elegant pale to sky-blue variety with a steely sheen and noticeably slender petals, set off by lemon-yellow anthers. Once established it forms clouds of pretty flowers held well above the leaves. Grows 24-30” high (60-75cm).

Camassia leichtlinii Alba AGM

Excellent when planted against a dark background, this variety has pure ivory-white flowers with pointed petals and is complimented with clear white anthers and stigmas. It takes a little longer to establish than some of the blues but well worth the wait. Grows 30-36” high (70-90cm).

Camassia leichtlinii Caerulea

Superb deep purple-blue flowers with white anthers. The flower segments twist together as they fade. Grows 30-36” high (70-90cm).

Camassia leichtlinii Semiplena

Usually the last variety to flower performing an excellent grand finale with tall and erect stems tightly packed with 50 or so semi-double cream flowers. It clumps up quickly to form an outstanding annual display – again this variety looks particularly good against a dark background.

Camassia quamash

This species produces the smallest bulbs of the group, but do not be fooled! – the display is possibly the best of all. It quickly clumps up to produce many stems of variable height bearing intense gentian-blue flowers that stop you in your steps. It is probably the best variety to naturalise in grass. Height varies between 10 and 20” (25-50cm).

Camassia quamash Blue Melody

A special form of Camassia quamash with the same intense blue flowers but attractive yellow-cream and green variegated leaves. A good one for pots. Height 10-14” (25-35cm)

Happy Gardening!

ENDS
