

# Prairie Plants for Cooking and Medicine

**Next to smoked salmon, camas was the most widely traded food among western Washington tribes.**

## AND ONE TO AVOID

For many centuries the people of the Chehalis tribe harvested prairie plants for food, fiber and medicine. During winter the people lived in large plank houses in permanent villages along the Chehalis River. In spring and summer they canoed the river and its tributaries to reach the prairies. They picked berries, dug bulbs and roots, gathered acorns, and harvested shoots, leaves and flowers.

### Oregon White Oak

*Quercus garryana*

Roasted acorns were an important source of vegetable protein. To preserve the acorns until spring, the Chehalis stored them in baskets and buried them in the mud of a slough.



### Graceful cinquefoil

*Potentilla gracilis*

Some cinquefoil plants have yellow flowers; others bloom white. Traditionally, Chehalis women drank tea made from a yellow-flowered plant to have a baby girl, or a white-flowered plant to have a baby boy.

### Chocolate lily

*Fritillaria affinis*  
*var. affinis*

The tiny bulblets look like rice and were traditionally cooked by steaming them in pits.

*Pit is dug in earth, sticks and stones are placed on top. Fire is lit.*

### Oregon sunshine or woolly sunflower

*Eriophyllum lanatum*

The dried flowers were used as part of a love charm.

*Stick is inserted and water poured down on heated stones. Pit is sealed and left to cook.*

### Meadow death-camas

*Zigadenus venenosus*

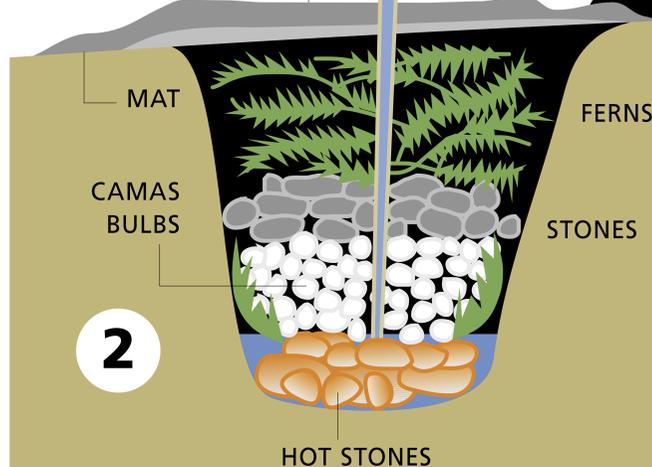
The leaves and bulbs of this poisonous plant are similar to edible blue camas. Many tribes took care to weed it from the places they harvested blue camas.



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## STEAM PIT COOKING

Camas blossoms turn the prairies to a carpet of blue in spring. The Chehalis people used pointed sticks to dig the bulbs and then cooked them in a pit in the ground. Roasted bulbs were smashed and pressed together like cheese to preserve them.