

THE SIMPLE THINGS

PLANT LIBRARY

CAMASSIA

TALL
SPIKES OF
STARRY
FLOWERS

Plant now for
blooms in spring

ILLUSTRATION: SARA MULVANNY. WORDS: CLARE GOGERTY

CAMASSIAS

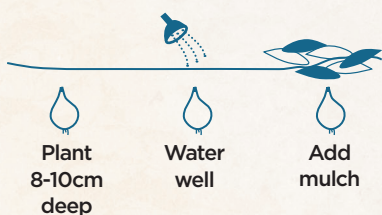
Camassias were much in favour at the Chelsea Flower Show this year and it's easy to see why: tall with striking, star-shaped flowers, they sway gracefully head and shoulders above more humdrum blooms. Get a few bulbs into a sunny border now and you too will enjoy the sight of their six-petalled flowers opening along straight stems next April/May. They're great in wildflower meadows, too – coming in subtle shades of blue and creamy white and spreading in satisfying clumps.

Need to know

Camassia leaves are slow to die down so if you do plant among grass, ie in a lawn, this will make mowing difficult. Best to plant in a meadow, then you can leave the leaves alone and let them die back naturally.

How to grow

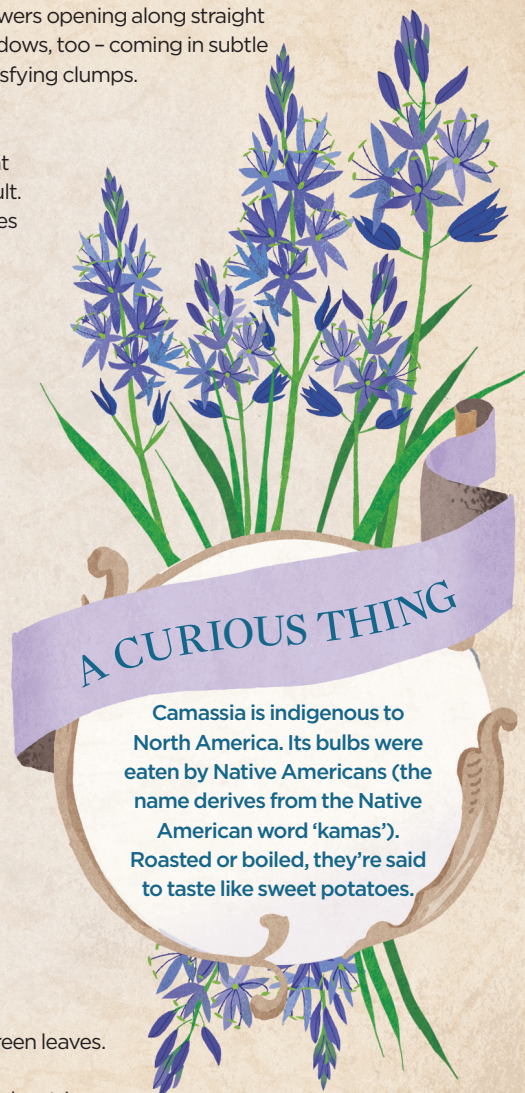
The best time to plant Camassia bulbs is now until the end of November. Plant bulbs 8-10cm deep and 8-10cm apart in moist, well-drained soil. Camassia can tolerate most conditions except waterlogged soil. Choose a spot where they will stay for a while – they don't like to be moved – and where they can spread. After planting, water well. Add a layer of mulch to protect from frost, and wait for first shoots to appear in February/March, and flowers in late April/May.



Camassia quamash: bright blue flowers and greyish green leaves. 20 bulbs, £3.99, rhsplants.co.uk

Camassia cusickii 'Zwanenburg': Blue flowers with a paler stripe down the middle. 5 bulbs, £9.50, harespringcottageplants.co.uk

Camassia leichtlinii alba. Creamy white star-shaped flowers. 3 bulbs, £5, avonbulbs.co.uk



Camassia is indigenous to North America. Its bulbs were eaten by Native Americans (the name derives from the Native American word 'kamas'). Roasted or boiled, they're said to taste like sweet potatoes.