

Northwest Native Spring Flower Garden

While the catalogs are arriving daily with pictures of fantastic tulips and daffodils, why not plan your spring show with Northwest Natives? The beauty of the native spring wildflowers of the northwest is incomparable. Just look at the display a hike up Silver Star Mountain gives you – worthy of National Geographic! You too can have a garden the envy of National Geographic (and your neighbors!) with drifts of native spring flowers. You can imitate nature and mix the colors and sizes of flowers, or go for a mass of one flower. Both approaches give beautiful results.



Erythronium hendersonii

Most of the native spring flowers are perennial and will die back in summer, to reappear next spring like magic. They make a great early blooming underplanting for annual color spots or other later summer bloomers that replace them in the same locality, covering the dying foliage. There are spring natives for every type of garden, from shade to full sun. A great

resource for the gardener looking for native plants is the [Washington Native Plant Society](http://www.washingtonnativeplantsociety.org) website. This website lists native plants according to categories of bloom time, color, and other garden characteristics, and links to pictures so you can anticipate color and size of bloom.

Among the native spring flowers that will dazzle the eye in early spring are those belonging to the *Erythronium* genus, which includes those flowers commonly called dogtooth violets, avalanche lilies, fawn lilies or trout lilies. Several species of this genus are suited to garden cultivation, and are available from native plant nurseries. Most of these are early spring bloomers, and like full sun to part shade with moist, well drained soil. They can self-sow and form colonies over time. The easiest to find in nurseries are the *E. oregonum*, a light yellow that is much prettier than daffodils!



Wildflowers on Silver Star Mountain



Erythronium oregonum



Erythronium revolutum

Another Northwest Native genus with a variety of species available is *Dodecatheon*, the shooting stars. These come in white, violet or magenta, with some variations in the basal leaves. The small clump of flowers on each plant is always a showstopper. Shooting stars can be grown in the garden in moist areas of sun to shade. They grow in the wild in meadows and rocky areas. They make a beautiful addition to the rock garden.



Dodecatheon species

In later spring, the *Camassia* genus provides blue or white flower stalks. Lewis and Clark saw vast meadows of these plants and described them as appearing as lakes in the distance. The town of Camas is named for them, and the bulbs were a staple in the Native American diet. The bulbs are available from nurseries, and cultivars have been developed with various sizes and shades of blue. Camas are native to open moist meadows that may dry out later in the summer. They do well in full sun in the garden.



Camassia leucostachya

Other spring flowering native genus to try in your garden include:

Trillium (see article [Trillium](#)) *Fritillaria* (chocolate lily), *Allium* (nodding onion), *Iris* (Oregon iris), *Dichelostemma* (*Brodiaea*) (wild hyacinth) and *Lupinus* (lupines). Of course our native bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*) and its relative Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucllaria*) make excellent garden additions.

Cultivars often bloom from spring into late summer. If you are looking for a wonderful early blooming shrub, you cannot do better than the native flowering current (*Ribes sanguineum*), which comes in red, pink or white flowers. There are way too many wonderful native flowers to list, so consult the references below, choose a few that suit your garden conditions and you too can outdo those boring tulips with some outstanding natives!

References

Armitage's Native Plants for North American Gardens by Allan M. Armitage, Timber Press Inc. 2006

Encyclopedia of Northwest Native Plants for Gardens and Landscapes by Kathleen A. Robson, Alice Richter and Marianne Filbert, Timber Press, Inc. 2008

[Washington Native Plant Society](#)

