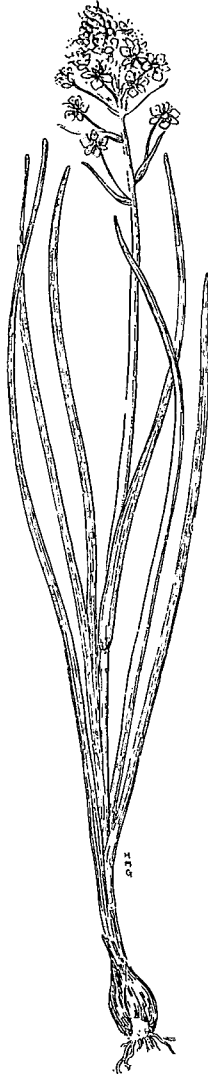


Death Camas

Meadow (Zygadenus venenosus)
 Foothill (Zygadenus paniculatus)



Where does it grow? Death camas is a common range plant of Oregon; it is found on both sides of the Cascades. It will grow in almost any type of soil and flourishes in both wet and dry conditions with meadow death camas found in more moist situations, and foothill death camas found in more dry situations.

Is it important? Yes! Death camas is one of our more toxic range plants; meadow death camas is considered the more poisonous species. Death camas is poisonous to all classes of range stock, especially sheep. Most losses occur on early spring and summer ranges because death camas starts growth early and becomes green and succulent far in advance of most other range plants. All parts of the plant are toxic, particularly the seeds. Fortunately the plants are dry and low in palatability at the time of seed dissemination.

What does it look like? Death camas belongs to the Lily family (Liliaceae). It is sometimes found in moderately thick stands, but most often it occurs singly over the range. The plants are slender grass-like herbs, with long, narrow, smooth, and mostly basal leaves. The flower stalks are from 4 inches to 3½ feet high and bear yellowish-white flowers on the upper 3 to 10 inches. The plants grow from an onion-like bulb.

Description:

Length of Life--Perennial.

Height--4 inches to 3½ feet, usually about 1½ feet.

Season--Flowers early, usually during April and May.

Leaves--Long, narrow (grass-like) arising from the base.

Flowers--The individual flowers are yellowish-white.

Seeds--The seeds are found in three-sided cylindrical capsules or pods.

Root--An onion-like bulb.

Does it look like anything else? At early stages of growth it is difficult to distinguish death camas from related, but harmless, plants such as camas, wild onions, and wild hyacinth. Wild onions can be identified by their characteristic odor. Camas can be identified by its blue flowers. If a cross-section of a leaf exposes a hollow mid-rib, the plant is a wild hyacinth.

What are the symptoms of poisoning? Symptoms of death camas poisoning include: frothing at the mouth, nausea with vomiting, great weakness resulting in collapse of the animal, followed by death in hours or perhaps days.

How can poisoning be controlled? The only practical means of defense are: (1) prohibit the stock from using heavily infested areas, (2) graze less susceptible stock such as cattle or horses, and (3) avoid early turnouts; wait until ample amounts of good forage are available.

Plant sketch from "Livestock Poisoning Weeds of Oregon" by Helen M. Gilkey.