

Olsynium douglasii

[Synonyms : *Sisyrinchium douglasii*, *Sisyrinchium douglasii* var. *douglasii*, *Sisyrinchium grandiflorum*]

DOUGLAS' GRASS WIDOW is a perennial. Native to western North America it has small satiny, purple to (occasionally) white flowers.

It is also known as Douglas' blue-eyed-grass, Grass widow, Purple-eyed grass, Purple snowdrop, Satinflower, Spring bell, and Spring satinflower.

Douglasii commemorates the celebrated Scottish plant collector and explorer, David Douglas (1798/9-1834). His interest in flora and fauna appears to have begun before his teens and he eventually worked in Glasgow University's botanical garden. Here he was destined to meet Sir William Hooker (1785-1865) who became his mentor and guide, and in time recommended him to the Horticultural Society of London then seeking a knowledgeable plant collector to send to North America. Thus in 1823 he was exploring parts of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers and what is now New Jersey. He made six expeditions and his exploration expanded to cover not only the Pacific Northwest but ultimately as far south as California and, on three occasions, visits to the Sandwich Islands (now familiar as Hawaii). That first major trip to the Columbia River was sponsored by the Hudson's Bay Company and the Horticultural Society of London arranged for Douglas both to study available material on North American trees and to meet Archibald Menzies (1754-1842) before he set out. Douglas met many leading lights in botany while in North America, and his explorations would eventually cover an incredible number of miles of unexplored territory (10,000 miles from 1825-1827 alone) far from civilization, living rough and mixing with many of the North American Indian tribes. In 1827 he returned to London briefly where he is said to have found his welcome overwhelming and was made a Fellow of The Geological Society and of The Zoological Society of London. During the Pacific Northwest expedition he had suffered snow-blindness and this led to his deteriorating eyesight which when he landed in Hawaii in December 1833 for the last time had reached the stage of virtually no sight in his right eye. His unexpected death occurred when he fell into a pit already occupied by a wild bull which crushed him. A subsequent inquest in Honolulu, where his grave can be found, concluded that there was no evidence of foul play but this did not stem suspicions, even today. He introduced about 240 plant species to Britain, many of which now bear his name.