

Zigadenus nuttallii

[Synonyms : *Amianthium nuttallii*, *Toxicoscordion nuttallii*]

DEATH CAMASH is a bulbous perennial. Native to central and southern North America it has tiny creamy or yellow flowers.

It is also known as Camas, Death camas, Merryhearts, Nuttall's camas, Nuttall's deathcamas, and Poison camas.

Warning – the whole plant (particularly stems, leaves, flowers and seeds) is poisonous and the virulence varies in different areas. It can cause gastroenteritis, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting, muscular weakness, breathing difficulties, twitching, collapse, coma and death. It can also be fatal for animals.

Nuttallii honours an English Yorkshireman, Thomas Nuttall (1786-1859) who was a printer, botanist, plant collector and ornithologist. He collected plants in the United States from about 1808 until just before the outbreak of the Anglo-American War of 1812-1815 which enabled a brief return to England with many plant species which had until then evaded the scientific community. Returning to the United States at War's end he again collected plants and from 1825-1834 was curator of the botanical gardens at Harvard University. At the same time he published works on plants, his travels, and ornithology. But Nuttall had itchy feet. He joined another expedition going out West under the leadership of the American explorer, Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth (1802-1856), then visited Hawaii and returned to explore the Pacific Northwest. These latter explorations were to lead to his attracting the name of 'the father of Western American botany'. From 1836-1841 he worked for what is now the The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia and then he finally returned to England to accept an inheritance following an uncle's death and there published, in particular, a work on North American trees.

The North American Gosiute Indian tribe used the plant to cause vomiting and in the treatment of venereal diseases.