Camas Life Cycle Narrative

Camas: A First Food and Seasonal Plant

For many generations, Camas has been one of the First Foods of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Peoples. First Foods are closely connected to seasons, place, and living systems. Studying Camas helps us notice how plants, land, water, and time work together when people pay attention to patterns across seasons.

Camas have a life cycle shaped by seasonal change. It begins as a seed and grows from a bulb underground. In early spring, green leaves grow above the soil. These leaves collect energy from sunlight and store it in the bulb below. Later, tall stems with blue flowers grow, attracting pollinators such as bees that help Camas reproduce.

As the seasons change, Camas change too. After flowering, seeds form. By early summer, the leaves and flowers disappear above ground, but the plants are not gone. The bulbs remain underground, holding energy while the plants are dormant. Dormancy is a resting time that helps Camas survive dry summer conditions and return when the seasons change again.

Camas grows in places with the right conditions, such as moist meadows, prairies, and areas near rivers and streams. These places provide the soil, water, and space Camas need to complete its life cycle. When these conditions stay healthy over time, Camas can continue to grow year after year.

Camas are a type of geophyte, which means the plant stores energy underground. This helps Camas survive changes above ground. Camas are also a perennial plant, meaning they can grow back without being replanted by people. Some bulbs grow slowly over many years before producing flowers. When plants can complete their life cycle without being disturbed, they can continue over time.

Because Camas returns year after year when its conditions are cared for, it has become a dependable First Food.

Camas is part of a connected living system. Its flowers support pollinators, and it depends on healthy soil, clean water, and seasonal cycles. Learning about Camas helps us understand how people, plants, and places are part of the same living system, and how careful attention to growing conditions supports balance and continuity over time.