



# native plant society of bc

## *Lilium columbianum* (Columbia lily)

**Meaning:** *Lilium* is derived from *lirion*, the Greek word for lily; *columbianum* means "of western North America".

**Description:** *Lilium columbianum* is a perennial that can be 40 to 120 cm tall. The leaves occur in whorls of six to nine. Each plant has several of the unmistakable yellow-orange to reddish-orange flowers. *Lilium columbianum* flowers from June to September

**Habitat:** Columbia lily grows in moist open forests, roadsides, clearings, thickets and meadows in the lowland and steppe to alpine zones.

**Range:** *Lilium columbianum* is native to western North America. In Canada, it is found only in British Columbia. In the United States, it is found in Washington, Oregon and in some northern parts of California, Idaho and Montana.

**Wildlife notes:** Columbia lily nectar is used by hummingbirds and butterflies.

**First Nations use:** A number of First Nations used the bulbs of *Lilium columbianum* as food. The bulbs were eaten in a variety of ways including raw, steamed, boiled, baked or in a soup. Some First Nations also dried the bulbs into cakes and used them during the lean months of winter. The Okanagan-Colville people dried the bulbs, mashed them with "stink bugs," powdered the result and used it as a remedy against *plhax*, or witchcraft.

**Gardening use:** First, as always with native plants, do NOT collect plants from the wild. Instead, check the Native Plant Society of BC's resources page at [www.npsbc.org](http://www.npsbc.org) to find a retailer that may sell *Lilium columbianum*. You can also grow Columbia lily from seed (and you can buy seed from the VanDusen Seed Collectors ([www.plantexplorers.com/vandusen/](http://www.plantexplorers.com/vandusen/))). It will take from three to five years before the plants will be large enough to flower.

Here are some tips from the Royal BC Museum's *Lilium columbianum* webpage: "Sow the dry seeds in pots in humus rich sandy soil in late fall or early winter so they undergo a cold season. Seeds should germinate the following spring or maybe not for another year. After a year of two in the pot, transplant the bulb during the fall dormant season to its final place in the garden. Choose a partly shaded site with shrub or perennial cover to keep the soil cool and moist but allowing the lily stalk, leaves and all, to emerge into the sunlight." For more, go to [www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/Natural\\_History/Plants.aspx?id=966](http://www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/Natural_History/Plants.aspx?id=966)



Photo: Dawn Hanna