

Fritillaria pudica

Common Name: Yellow bells

General: *Fritillaria pudica*, or Yellow bells, is a monocot and member of the lily family. It is an early bloomer in the Palouse area – usually flowering in April or May, or even early June in the higher elevations. It can be found in grassy sites, in sagebrush country or under stands of open ponderosa pine in the drier environments in all the Northwest states including northeast California. 1 to 3 bell-shaped flowers rise from a single floral stem which has linear leaves high on the stem. The corm is deep-seated and forms mini-bulblets around the rim. The flower is generally 2 to 6" high; the leaves usually extend a little higher. The flower may turn to orange or brown as it ages and is followed by a round seed pod. The flower is said to be fragrant but is so low to the ground it is often not evident to the casual observer. Each flower is composed of 6 tepals and 6 stamens. The seed pod is 3-parted and erect and taller than the nodding flower.



Variations: There can be some variation in the flower color but this is not common. A few named varieties were found on the web (*'Fragrance'*, *'Giant'*, *'Richard Britten'*). At least two bulb catalogues listed these bulbs in their offerings (Van Engelen and John Scheepers).

Use in the landscape: Although the bulb could be dug and transplanted into a dry area of the garden this is not recommended because the plants would be easily exterminated in a fragile habitat. Like the trillium, if the plant stem were to break during transplanting, it would rob the bulb of its bloom for the current year and of the potential bloom for the next. Propagating from seed may take three to four years to get a bloom. Seeds can be sown directly in dry locations with spring moisture or propagated in seed pans in soil which is composed of 40% sandy grit, 40% loam, 10% peat and 10% perlite. The young plants should be transplanted to the garden site when dormant. The bulb will settle deeper with each year as it ages. This is a favorite bulb of alpine and rock garden societies. It can be combined with other small bulbs that like a moist spring but go dormant in the summer and would be a good candidate for trough containers where it is less likely to be smothered by larger plants.

Edibility: The bulb was eaten fresh or steamed in pits by Eastern Washington and Idaho Native Americans. The green seed pod is also edible.

Pests: Bear, deer, and ground squirrels often will eat the corm, the leaves or the seed pod.

Fritillaria pudica was collected by Lewis and Clark from the Clearwater River and noted by Douglas near present day Spokane.

Other family members found in the area: *Fritillaria lanceolata* (Checker Lily, Mission Bells) at McCrosky Park.

Native Plants should not be dug from the wild. Please purchase from reputable dealers.

For more information do a Google search on *fritillaria pudica*. Or see Arthur R. Kruckeberg, [Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest](#).