

Lily Roots — Laagaq

LAAGAT QATERTAARTUT. – LILY ROOTS ARE WHITE.



Photo: Akhiok woman with lily roots and Chocolate Lily flower. Photo by Priscilla Russell, KANA Collection.

The chocolate lily (*Fritillaria camschatcensis*) is a delicate flowering plant with lance-shaped leaves and clusters of dark purple or brown bell-shaped flowers. It is widely distributed throughout the coastal meadows of the North Pacific, ranging from the western United States to Japan. This perennial plant grows from a bulb of many rice-like roots and is sometimes called the rice lily. Despite its appetizing names, the flower emits an unpleasant, rotting odor that attracts pollinating flies.

The starchy root of the chocolate lily is edible and was traditionally collected by Alutiiq people in late summer. In August and September, people unearthed lily roots with digging sticks or collected them from vole caches. Many people preserved a portion of their harvest for winter use. Lily roots were ground into a flour or packed in seal stomach with oil and berries. The roots were eaten raw, roasted, boiled till tender, and mixed with seal oil, or combined with sourdock and berries to create a tasty side dish. They were also added to Alutiiq ice cream—*akutaq*—a dish made by mixing fat, berries, and fish eggs with lily roots. In the historic era, mashed potatoes

replaced lily roots in this popular dish.