



Onionweed

Onionweed (*Asphodelus fistulosus*) is an attractive herbaceous perennial in the lily family. It has six-petaled, white flowers. Each petal has a thin chocolate brown stripe in its center. The plant is usually about a foot tall and almost as wide. Clusters of long, tapering, round, hollow leaves very much resemble chives or scallions. Leaves sprout after winter rains, flowers appear in spring, and plants die to the ground during the dry season.

Onionweed is an aggressive invasive species that was introduced as an ornamental. Once established, it easily escapes cultivation into surrounding unirrigated land. It seeds prolifically and can establish large populations quickly. It is unpalatable to livestock and wildlife. To date it tends to invade disturbed ground, so it is unclear whether it will be a threat to natural communities.

Native to southern Europe, Mediterranean Africa, and Western Asia. According to the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum in Tucson, onionweed plants may have been introduced into the United States in the 1980s. They were offered for sale in Alpine, Texas and Phoenix, Arizona as early as 1984. Some of the original U.S. plants were collected from a naturalized population near Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, where the species was documented in 1930. In the United States onionweed occurs in California (in several coastal southern counties), New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. In Arizona, it is documented in Pima and Santa Cruz Counties. There is also a small population on private property in Sedona.

Onionweed is a federally listed noxious weed in the U.S. This means that it is illegal to knowingly sell, purchase, barter, exchange, give, or receive this plant. It is also on several state noxious weed lists including Alabama, California, Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, and Vermont. You may wonder why it is on some state's noxious weed list when it does not yet occur there. This is because they don't want it and will be able to manage it immediately if it ever does appear. Prevention is one of the best noxious/invasive species management strategies.

If you find onionweed on your property, you should remove it. The best way to control a small population is to dig it out including the root system. Pulling without digging is ineffective because the roots will resprout. Translocated herbicides can also be used to control larger populations.



Onionweed is a pretty plant, once grown as an ornamental in Arizona. USDA APHIS Archives. National Park Service.

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