

WILD ONION

Allium unifolium Kellogg

plant symbol = ALUN

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center



Alfred Brousseau
© Brother Eric Vogel, St. Mary's College
@ CalPhotos

Alternate Names

Many species of *Allium* are known by the general term of wild onion.

Uses

Ethnobotanic: The young foliage of *Allium unifolium* is delicious and can be used in the place of chives. This onion was gathered for food by the Pomo, Yuki, Wailaki, and Nomlaki. The Yuki and other tribes harvested the bulb and base of the leaves and fried them before eating. Sometimes the bulb was eaten raw. The Pomo usually ate the bulb raw and sometimes baked the bulb in an earth oven. Today individuals of many tribes still gather different species of wild onions.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status and wetland indicator values.

Description

General: Lily Family (Liliaceae). This herbaceous perennial plant has herbage with the characteristic taste and smell of onions. The scape is 30-80 cm high and the leaves are 2-3, widely channeled and keeled. Reproduction is from wrinkled, black seeds contained in a capsule or by bulbs of 1-2 cm. Each ovoid to oblique bulb arises on a stout lateral

rhizome, the old bulb not persisting. Ten to thirty lavender-pink to white flowers are in an umbel subtended by 2 or 3 thin whitish or scarious bracts.

Distribution

For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site. This plant is found in moist clay or serpentine in closed-cone pine forests, mixed evergreen forests, grassy streambanks, and chaparral below 1100 m. It is found in northwestern California, central-western California, and Oregon.

Establishment

Caution: This onion is rather uncommon today. Therefore, do not dig up the bulbs in the wilds, but rather purchase them and plant them in the ground in autumn.

The bulbs should be planted 1 to 3 inches deep in a well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade. *Allium* species do especially well in raised beds for drainage. Water them after planting and then let the rains come. Weed around the plants. Most animals don't eat wild onions. This species of wild onion can be invasive.

If establishing the plant by seed, plant the seeds in the fall in pots in partial shade. Scatter the seeds on top of a well-drained soil. Sprinkle a thin layer of dirt over the top and place quarter-inch gravel over the soil. Water the pots and keep them slightly moist. Stop watering when the leaves shrivel in the early summer. Out-Plant the two-year-old seedlings in the garden or wildlands during the summer or fall. Let the rains do the watering.

Management

Separate the plants every several years and replant.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

ALUN is available from native plant nurseries within its range. Please check the Vendor Database, expected to be on-line through the PLANTS Web site in 2001 by clicking on Plant Materials.

References

Chesnut, V.K. 1902. *Plants used by the Indians of Mendocino County, California*. Contributions from the U.S. National Herbarium Vol. VII. Reprinted by the Mendocino County Historical Society in 1974.

Davies, D. 1992. *Alliums: The ornamental onions*. Timber Press, Inc., Portland, Oregon.

Hickman, J.C. (ed.). 1993. *Allium*. pp. 1172-1179
IN: The Jepson Manual: Higher Plants of California.
University of California Press, Berkeley, California.

Mathew, B. 1997. *Growing bulbs: The complete practical guide*. Timber Press, Inc., Portland, Oregon.

USDA, NRCS 1999. *The PLANTS database*.
National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
<<http://plants.usda.gov>>. Version: 990412.

Voegelin, E.W. 1938. *Tubatulabal ethnography*.
Anthropological Records Vol 2:(1):1-84.

Prepared By & Species Coordinators

M. Kat Anderson

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center
c/o Environmental Horticulture Department,
University of California, Davis, California

Wayne Roderick

Former Director of the East Bay Regional Parks
Botanic Garden, Berkeley, California

Edited: 05dec00 jsp

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.