

WILD ONION

Allium unifolium Kellogg

Plant Symbol = ALUN

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



Alfred Brousseau
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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. The Pomo, Yuki, Wailaki, and Nomlaki gathered this onion for food. 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.

References

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Edited: 05dec00 jsp; 17mar03 ahv; 30may06jsp

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Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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