

# Chincherinchee (*Ornithogalum thyrsoides*)



**Chincherinchee is an invasive weed that is toxic to stock and threatens bushland across the Adelaide Hills.**

## What is chincherinchee?

Chincherinchee (*Ornithogalum thyrsoides*) is an emerging weed that has escaped from gardens, is toxic to stock and invades intact bushland. It forms dense infestations, displaces native vegetation and threatens the integrity of natural ecosystems.

Chincherinchee lays dormant over summer and autumn, leaving the ground bare and vulnerable to erosion. It can produce large amounts of viable seed and rapidly establishes new populations. Some infestations are found well away from trails in intact scrub, so it appears to be spread by animals and humans. The plant is hardy and resistant to most traditional weed management solutions.

Chincherinchee directly threatens nationally endangered vegetation including two spider orchids and grey box grassy woodlands, and critical refuges for the nationally endangered chestnut-rumped heathwren and southern brown bandicoot. In South Africa where it originates, chincherinchee occupies a wide range of habitats.

Here in South Australia there is potential for it to far exceed known populations, so be aware of chincherinchee and avoid planting it in your garden.

Chincherinchee is sometimes referred to as 'Star of Bethlehem'. This name is more commonly used for *Ornithogalum umbellatum*.

Other species in the *Ornithogalum* genus have the potential to become invasive weeds, like *Ornithogalum arabicum*. You may find a variety of *Ornithogalum* species at nurseries and florists, so when looking for white flowering plants, please consider alternatives. Even cut flowers can go to seed.

## How to identify Chincherinchee

Chincherinchee:

- is a stiff upright perennial bulb up to 50 cm tall when flowering
- produces attractive white flowers in spring and early summer; each flower has 6 petals that are 2-2.5 cm long around a dark centre, with clusters of between 11 and 70 flowers per plant
- leaves emerge from the bulb in June, and die off in summer; they are hairless, fleshy, strappy, and grow to approximately 10-30 cm in length and 2-6 cm in width with around 6 leaves per adult plant
- seeds are very small and black with 'warts'; each mature plant can produce around 500 per season
- has an underground bulb with many fleshy layers which can grow to approximately 3 cm in diameter; mature plants produce bulbils along the roots, so take care when removing by hand.

For help with identification, contact Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu on 8391 7500 to speak with your local Stewardship Officer.



Early Chincherinchee leaves and bulbs; note small bulbils growing from roots (Photo: Kym Smith)

## Chincherinchee look-alikes

A few native and introduced plants look similar to chincherinchee. If unsure, wait until early spring to identify when flowering. The pictured milkmaids (*Burchardia umbellata*) below is one native look-alike.



This native plant, Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata* can be confused with chincherinchee (Photo: Kym Smith)

## How it spreads

Chincherinchee produces large amounts of seed that can spread over long distances. It's thought to spread via water runoff, earth moving/garden machinery, and by humans and animals. This is why weed hygiene is so important if you come across a patch. Make sure your clothes and shoes are not carrying the seeds/bulbils via soil before leaving the area.

## Control Methods

Kill or remove the bulb and remove flowers to seed set (generally October/November), then follow up every year until the bulbs and seed bank is exhausted. This is essential for effective control.

Chemical application at early leaf emergence can deliver positive results, however the more effective herbicides have limited application in bushland due to off-target damage of native plants. If using herbicide, ensure it is used for its intended purpose and always follow label instructions.

To contain large infestations, consider brush-cutting at early flowering (prior to flower buds opening).

Although resource intensive, hand digging bulbs is an effective control method. Prevent spread when disposing of plant material e.g. do not place any plant material in the green bin.

For detailed advice on control methods, and disposing of this plant, contact Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu.



A field of chincherinchee (Photo: Amanda Pearce).

## Further information

Further information is available through Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu

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