

Star-of-Bethlehem

Ornithogalum umbellatum



[Further
Information
and
References](#)

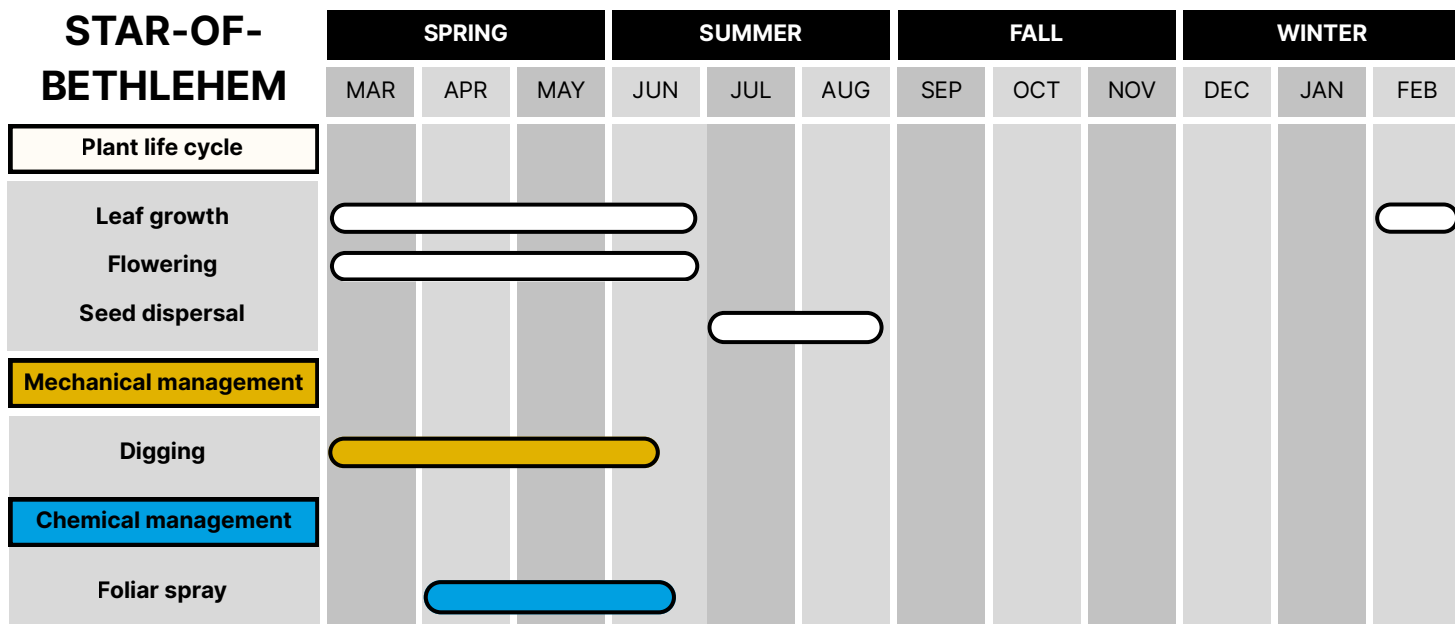


Quick Facts: Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) is an herbaceous perennial plant that was originally introduced to North America as an ornamental flower and has since escaped cultivation. It emerges and flowers in the spring and withers and dies back by summertime. Dense colonies of plants can form over time, outcompeting other spring-emerging plants. It can be found in lawns, streambanks, meadows, degraded woodlands, and rangeland. Although Star-of-Bethlehem is not a weed typically encountered in conventional row cropping systems, it can become problematic in no-till and organic production systems. This plant is toxic to humans and livestock if ingested.

Invasion Strategy: This plant reproduces by forming colonies. Below-ground bulbs produce bulblets that split off and grow into new plants. Bulbs buried as deep as 3-4 inches can sprout and grow. Even fragments of bulbs that have been uprooted and moved to new locations can resprout. Reproduction via seed is minimal.

Identifying Features: Star-of-Bethlehem is low-growing and can look like dark green patches of grass when plants are not in bloom. Star-of-Bethlehem can be identified by several unique characteristics:

- Bulbs are white and ovoid.
- Bulbs are located beneath, or partially beneath, the soil surface.
- Leaves are shiny, long, narrow, and dark green with a white midrib (middle area). They are somewhat succulent in appearance.
- Leaves emerge directly from the ground with no visible stem.
- When flowers emerge, they are held on leafless stems up to 1 foot tall (but often shorter).
- Flowers are white, 6-petaled, and star-shaped.
- Flowers appear in clusters of 3-10.
- Seed capsules are 3-lobed and contain several black seeds.



This chart is based on USDA plant hardiness zone 6. Plant growth and treatment times vary by region.

Management methods:

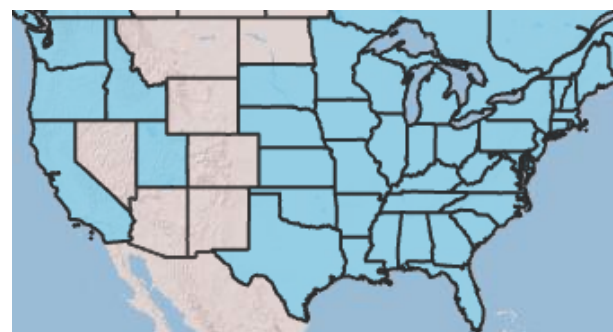
Mechanical - To control this species, dig the bulbs out of the ground. Control is easiest in the spring when foliage is visible. It may take multiple passes or years to remove all bulbs from a site. Tilling, smothering, tarping, and mowing are generally ineffective.

Chemical - This species can be treated with foliar herbicides, but is resistant to some products. Foliar sprays may be most effective towards the end of the leaf growth period (May-June).

Disclaimer - Selecting the best management method for this plant can be site and context-specific. Check with your local University Extension agent to explore your options and determine what is most appropriate for your location and situation.

Management information: Due to the toxicity of this species, gloves are recommended when digging by hand. Dispose of plant materials where they cannot resprout.

Personal protective equipment is recommended when removing any invasive species, and especially when using herbicides. Always follow label instructions when using herbicide.



Species present

Absent

Look-Alike Species:

- Spring Beauty, *Claytonia virginica*
- Spring Beauty (supplemental photos 1 and 2) is a native spring ephemeral found in areas with dappled sunlight. The leaves and flowers of this plant look very similar to Star-of-Bethlehem. Spring Beauty leaves don't have a white midrib, and flowers are fewer, pinker, and have more rounded petals.



Look-Alike Species:

- Spring Crocus, *Crocus spp.*
- Spring Crocus (supplemental photos 3 and 4) is a naturalized ornamental that flowers in early spring. While the flowers of star of Bethlehem and crocus are very different, their foliage is similar at first glance.



References and Additional Reading:

- State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management. 2021. [March 2021 Invasive Plant of the Month](#). [Identification, mechanical, and chemical control information].
- Purdue University Extension. 2015. [Star-of-Bethlehem Management](#). [Identification, mechanical, and chemical control information].
- Southern Illinois University. [Star-of-Bethlehem](#). [Identification and chemical control information].
- Illinois Wildflowers. 2026. [Spring Beauty](#). [Identification information].
- Midwest Invasive Species Network. 2026. [Star of Bethlehem \(Ornithogalum umbellatum\)](#). [Identification, mechanical, and chemical control information].

Photo Credits: Photo 1: iNaturalist, fiogdavis; Photo 2: iNaturalist, Jennifer McDonald; Photo 3: iNaturalist, bumblebeegirl24; Photo 4: iNaturalist, swords; Range map: USDA PLANTS database; Supplemental photo 1: iNaturalist, Annabelle Ramos; Supplemental photo 2: iNaturalist, Ray Stewart; Supplemental photo 3: iNaturalist, Manu Fréchette; Supplemental photo 4: iNaturalist, Mauro m.

Resources:

- Find your local [University Extension Program](#)
- Find your local [USDA NRCS Service Center](#)
- Find your local [Soil and Water Conservation District](#)
- Check out other invasive plant fact sheets
- Check out Pollinator Partnership's agriculture page

Acknowledgements:

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