

Weed Information Sheet:

Siberian squill

Scilla siberica

AKA: *Othocallis siberica*, spring scilla, wood squill

Asparagaceae (Asparagus family)

Identification:

Common	Perennial, forb	Height: 4-8"	Width: 4-8"	Leaf Arrangement: alternate
Flower: Blue	Blooms: Early spring	Fruit: Capsule	Fall Color: n/a	

This species is one of the earliest to flower in the spring. Its six-petaled blue flowers and lily-like leaves make it distinctive. There is a single flower per stalk, a related species Petals may be draping forming a bell-like structure (Image 5), or open with petals nearly perpendicular to the central stigmas and styles (Image 4). It grows 6-10" tall with leaves spreading to roughly the same width. The root is a bulb that can be 4-10" below the soil surface. It can sometimes be found as isolated plants, but is most often found in large colonies of dozens to thousands of flowers. This plants life cycle is short, a true spring ephemeral, going dormant around the time trees leaf-out. Once pollinated, flowers develop into elongated, slightly angular pods that lay on the ground as the leaves die back.

A related species, Forbes' glory-of-the-snow (*Scilla forbesii*) has a single central stalk with flowers emerging from short branches along this stalk. This species also spreads aggressively and has the potential to become invasive.



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Scilla siberica

Habitat:

Gardens, woodlands in and adjacent to urban areas.



Description & Impact:

Siberian squill is a classic example of an oridental plant escaping and becoming invasive. It is indigenous to southwestern Russia, and Turkey. Despite its common name it is not native to Siberia. This species is most common in urban areas where it escapes from gardens into lawns and natural areas, especially woodlands. It can also be found in rural areas when it escapes from farm yards into adjacent woodlands and roadside ditches.

The plant itself is highly toxic, potentially fatal if eaten. As a result it is not a food source for any wildlife, further allowing it to out-compete native plants. Specifically, it wipes out our native spring ephemerals as it spreads. Though I cannot confirm that Siberian squill is allelopathic, often dense patches of this species have few plants growing in those areas later in the growing season as well.

Control Methods:

Manual: Pulling is ineffective. It will simply result in the upper part of the plant breaking off, leaving the bulb in the ground to sprout again next year.

In order to kill the plant, you *must* remove the bulb from the soil, which can quite deep at times. Digging individual plants can be done with a hori-hori or hand trowel. If you are failing to get to the bulb or this effort is going to slowly, using a garden fork or full-sized shovel to dig up all the soil in an area, and then sifting through to remove all the bulbs may be required. Dispose of the roots in a sealed plastic bag in the trash. Since all parts of the plant are poisonous, and contact with juices can cause skin irritation, wear gloves whenever handling this species.

Chemical: Using herbicide to control this species can be tricky due to its short life cycle and leaves which repel water. Timing is key, herbicide must be applied once leaves are fully spread out, to shortly after flowering begins, otherwise the herbicide will not be drawn down to the roots, and if far too late, the plant can complete flowering and produce seeds despite your effort.

For large infestations best recommendation for herbicide is to use triclopyr. An ester formulation (Garlon® 4) in mineral oil, at the highest concentration allowed on the label for foliar application should be successful. An amine formulation (Vastlan® or Garlon® 3A) in a water solution will likely only be able to penetrate the leaves if a crop oil, such as Methalated Soybean Oil is added to the herbicide mix as directed on the product label. This approach is likely to burn grasses, but they should be able to resprout from the roots. Glyphosate may also work if mixed this way, however it will certainly kill any plants, including grasses, that are green and growing that it comes in contact with (though later emerging species will be fine).

Some sources suggest using a product with sulfentrazone as the active ingredient, such as Ortho Nutsedge Killer, though I have no direct experience with this product, it seems likely to work and is readily available at garden centers.

Clipping the plant close to the ground and applying a few drops of concentrated herbicide should also be successful, being faster and causing less disturbance than digging. I would recommend using imazapyr (Polaris®, etc) or triclopyr at the highest concentration allowed on the label for a "low volume, high concentration application".

Controlling this species is difficult by any means you choose. The fact that you have to wait a whole year to see if your efforts are successful further complicates the effort.

Citations: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/scilla-siberica/>
<https://www.invasivespeciescentre.ca/siberian-squill/>
<https://ask.extension.org/kb/faq.php?id=622458>