

# Oniongrass

(*Melica bulbosa*)

Where is it found? Oniongrass is found in all Eastern Oregon counties, but is especially thick on shallow soils at high elevations where there is long snow cover. In overgrazed flats, wet in the spring and dry in the summer, it likes to associate with wild onion, members of the lily family, cous, camas, mules-ears; cinquefoil, geranium, and other plants with bulbs or enlarged roots.

Is it important? Not very. It is good feed and sometimes, as on stock driveways, it makes up a high percentage of the feed. It is palatable most any time to both domestic and wild animals. It doesn't have many leaves, so is a low yielder.

What does it look like? In Oregon it grows about a foot high, occasionally up to two feet in good locations. It grows in small clumps with only a few seed-heads, and not many leaves. Flower heads are purplish, narrow, point straight up, and are composed of numerous short branches that hug the main stem so that you have to look closely to see that there are any branches. Just under the ground are a close little group of onion-like bulblets, each one usually attached to a stem. These are stem enlargements, not really true bulbs.

◀ Oniongrass is important on stock driveways and on big overgrazed flats such as Logan Valley, Grant County (1/2 x).

## Description:

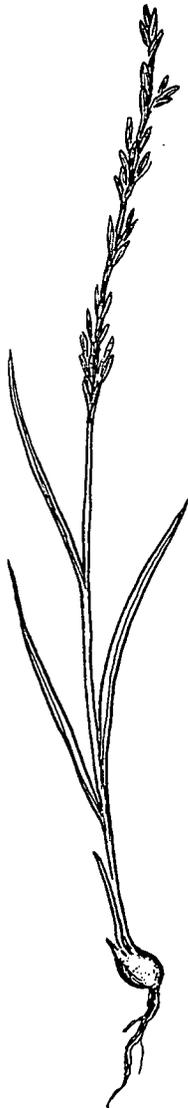
Length of life--Long-lived perennial.

Height--In Oregon mostly about a foot, may be taller.

Sod or bunch--Bunch, but with bulb-like enlargements. Bunches are small and rather open or loose, not compact or tufted. Not many leaves at base.

Leaves--Scanty, with very few at base. Most grasses without many basal leaves won't stand close grazing, but this grass comes into closely grazed places. Leaves narrow, rather short, taper to long point.

Spikelets usually carry about 6 small seeds (4 x).



▲ Spike on seedhead (2 x).



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Description: (continued)

Stems--Mostly about a foot high, each with a swollen base, just below the ground, resembling a small wild onion.

Flowerheads--Narrow, extend straight up, about 4 inches long. Spikelets are on little branches that hug the main flowering stem so they are hard to see at a glance. The heads thus look covered with grain (seeds). There are no awns (beards) on the grains.

Oniongrass comes into thin, rocky soils ► at high elevations such as this high ridge in Grant County.



Does it look like any other grass? Yes, the seedhead resembles many other grasses, especially the fescues. But the oniongrasses are the only ones with this type of heads that have bulbs at the base of the stems.