Oh, Beautiful Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*)

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*The snowdrop and primrose our woodlands adorn,
and violets bathe in the wet o’ the morn.*

—Robert Burns

Take a walk in many no-till fields that will be planted to a crop or stroll across lawns or golf-course greens in the spring, and it is not hard to spot the small, white flower of the star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum* L.). Star-of-Bethlehem is an aggressive weed of lawns, pastures, gardens, and many no-till agriculture fields of the temperate regions of the United States and indeed the world (Hagerman and Young 2004; Johnson and Nice 2015).

**Etymology**

The genus name *Ornithogalum* is derived from the Greek words *ornis*, meaning “bird,” and *gala*, meaning “milk.” The genus was named and described by Dioscorides (40 to 90 C.E.) in *De Materia Medica* because they have an abundance of white flowers that when “opened they are like milk.” *Umbellatum* means with umbels or umbellets (Bailey 1963; Gleason 1963; Horn and Cathcart 2005).

Carl Linnaeus first described and named the star-of-Bethlehem in his *Species Plantarum* in 1753. He described this plant and named it *Dove’s dung*, which is mentioned in the Bible (II Kings 6:25) during the siege of Samaria (Anonymous 2015a). Whether it is actually the Dove’s dung referred to in the Bible is unclear, but its presence in that region of the Middle East today may indicate that it could very well be a plant of biblical times (Swenson 2000). Later, when Antoine Laurent de Jussieu described and placed the plants in the Liliaceae (Lily) family, *star-of-Bethlehem* was added. However, relatively recent revisions have placed it in the