

***Asphodelus tenuifolius* Cavan.**  
Liliaceae



Compiled by Dr. Salima Benhouhou

■ **Morphological description**

An annual plant, with tubers at the base, from 20 to 30 cm. high. The leaves are not attached to an aerial stem but spring from the underground tuber or bulb, often 15 to 20 cm. long, slightly fleshy, cylindrical, hollow in the middle, glabrous and dark green. The leaves form a circular cluster at the base of the plant. The inflorescence is a simple, raceme, elongated, indeterminate cluster with stalked flowers. The small flowers have six white tepals. The fruits are small capsules with minute black seeds. Flowering takes place in early spring from March to May.

■ **Geographical distributio**

**Local:** Common in the Algerian Sahara.

**Regional:** North Africa.

**Global:** A common plant throughout the whole Sahara.

■ **Ecology**

This small annual plant thrives in desert conditions with an average 100 mm. rainfall a year. It is always found in non-saline wadi beds and has a fairly wide ecological range for soil type, occurring on sand-loamy and on gravelly soils.

■ **Status**

According to the IUCN criteria this saharo-sindian species falls into the "C" category. No conservation problems are reported for this plant which has a high dispersal capacity due to the numerous seeds produced by each individual.

***Asphodelus tenuifolius* Cavan.**

*Asphodelus fistulosus* L.

*Asphodelus*: generic name of Asphodel indicating in Latin and Greek several species of Liliaceae, dedicated to the gods of hell and death who were supposed to eat the tubers; *tenuifolius*: narrow-leaved

**Arabic:** tazia, acheub el ibel, barwaq

**Targui:** izayan

**English:** narrow-leaved asphodel

**French:** asphodèle à petites feuilles

■ **Part used**

The leaves and fruits are collected in spring and prepared by maceration in olive oil; the seeds are crushed. The crushed seeds are taken internally, mixed with honey or olive oil; the liquid obtained from the macerated leaves is used externally as a massage.

■ **Constituents**

Beta-sitosterol, stigmasterol, 1,8-dimethoxynaphthalene, naphthalene and anthraquinone derivatives, linoleic acid.

■ **Pharmacological action and toxicity**

The plant is not reported as toxic by nomads. Eaten in big quantities, it can provoke indigestion.

■ **Pharmacopeias**

Not relevant for this species.

■ **Pharmaceutical products**

Not relevant for this species.

■ **Traditional medicine and local knowledge**

Taken for colds and haemorrhoids (seeds); a febrifuge; used for rheumatic pain.

This small asphodelus is also widely used for various culinary purposes. The leaves are either boiled or cooked in oil, the seeds are crushed and mixed with flour to make bread, and the young shoots are added raw to food to enhance the taste. This plant is little appreciated as pasture.

In Egypt, the seeds are reported to be diuretic and are eaten with yoghurt.

Similar uses as in Algeria are reported for Morocco. It is also used for healing wounds. The seeds are mixed with cereals to make traditional bread and are also eaten as delicacies when mixed with dates. The leaves are fried or boiled and are sometimes put in the sauce for couscous.

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## ■ References

### Relevant to the plant and its uses

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