

# What is That Plant?

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## ANSWERS

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**Plant No. 1** is a native globemallow. There are approximately 12 species (and several varieties) found in Arizona. Flower color varies from apricot (the most common)

to red, pink, lavender, pale yellow and white. Many of the globemallows flower in spring and again in summer. Another common name for globemallow is sore-eye poppy, from claims that the plant irritates the eyes. However, Native Americans used the plant for healing some ailments and the stems as a type of chewing gum. Globemallow colors the Arizona landscape in the spring and summer and provides some forage for wildlife and livestock. Despite the sore-eye claim, globemallow has more good attributes than bad.



**Plant No. 2** is Russian knapweed, a foreign pest that originated in southwestern Asia and Eurasia. This is clearly a bad plant. One attribute of Russian knapweed is its ability to

establish nearly single species infestations if it is not eradicated during early stages. Deep, extensive, perennial roots that propagate from vegetative buds enable Russian knapweed to encroach into and then dominate a wide range of habitats. The leaves and stems are poisonous to horses, but they will not graze this weed unless there is nothing else to eat. However, hay contaminated with Russian knapweed can poison horses. Poisoning by this knapweed causes a condition known as chewing disease in which jaw and throat muscles are paralyzed to the point horses can not chew or swallow.



**Plant No. 3** is a native grass called tobosa. It occurs in heavy clay soils in central and southern Arizona. A close relative is galleta, which is found in northern Arizona and

the Mohave desert. Both of these perennial grasses provide soil protection, cover for wildlife and forage for livestock. Tobosa exhibits most of its growth (and grazing potential) during the summer monsoon season, drying out to a coarse, low value forage during the winter. This plant would fit in the good or harmless category.



**Plant No. 4** is another bad one - buffelgrass. Based on botanical evidence, this grass was first introduced into Arizona between

1938 and 1944. By 1979, this African grass was widely distributed across the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. Buffelgrass is drought-tolerant and easily colonizes and spreads. This adds a fuel source for wildfires that historically did not occur in the Sonoran Desert. Many native desert plants such as saguaro, palo verde and ironwood are not tolerant of fire. As buffelgrass increases, the probability for more fire and less native Sonoran Desert vegetation increases. Winter temperatures limit distribution in Arizona to warm deserts.



**Plant No. 5** is Malta starthistle and is another plant not native to Arizona. Malta starthistle is an annual that germinates when moisture is available

during fall or winter, survives winter as rosette and then produces yellow flowers with spines and seeds in May and June. This weed is native to southern Europe and was first documented in Arizona in 1901. Infestations typically inhabit areas that receive some kind of disturbance. Due to this weed's fall and winter growing season, by early spring the plants are already aggressive competitors for space, moisture, light and nutrients before native plants begin their spring emergence. This plant is definitely a bad one.



**Plant No. 6** is a native known by such names as silverleaf nightshade, white horse-nettle, or blueweed. It grows on rangeland, disturbed sites in urban areas,

roadways, and farm fields. Though some people may put it in the harmless category, others would call it a problematic weed. It is not readily eaten by livestock due the spines, but it is poisonous. The small fruits (green or dry) are the most poisonous part of the plant. Interestingly, the fruits have been used by Mexicans and Native Americans to curdle milk for home-made cheese. Some people might think of this plant as harmless, while others consider it bad.