

# Oxalis latifolia

## Recognize the problem

Family: Oxalidaceae (woodsorrel family).

Common names: Sorrel, broadleaf woodsorrel, fishtail oxalis.

**Luganda:** Kanyebwa; **Kinyarwanda:** Ubwunyu bwa Nyamanza; **French:** Oseille, trèfle.

A stemless perennial herb which grows from a system of small bulbs and spreads through the ground via stolons (runners); leaves are trifoliate and comprised of three heart-shaped leaflets; inflorescence comprised of several pink/purple flowers.

Leaves: Green, hairless, compound with 3 leaflets; individual leaflets are broadly fish-tail or heart shaped, 3-6 cm across. There is no stem, the leaves are formed on petioles up to 30 cm long at ground level. Individual leaflets fold along the midrib at night.

Flowers: Each flower is 10-20 mm across and comprised of 5 petals. The petals are pink/purple on the inside and greenish on the outside. Flowers are borne on an umbel in clusters of 5-12 flowers.

Bulbs: Scaly, 1-2 cm diameter; the daughter bulbs (bulbils) are formed at the end of stolons which grow up to 10 cm long; stolons may number 30 or more per plant.

Seeds: Dark yellow to orange, ribbed and 1 mm long; the seed capsules explode when mature dispersing the seeds up to 40 cm.

## Background

Origin: Latin America.

Introduction: Deliberately as an ornamental, also as ground cover in plantations.

Habitat: Humid tropical and subtropics regions, especially at higher elevations; favoured by intense cultivation due to removal of other vegetation; grows on a wide range of soils.

Spread: Reproduces by both bulbils and seed; seeds spread by wind, certain cultivation techniques (i.e. harrowing, rotary tillage) spread bulbils.

Invades: Many crops, ornamentals, plantations, orchards, gardens, wastelands.

Impacts: This weed has been recorded in at least 37 countries and is a major weed in Uganda, South Africa, India, New Zealand and Australia. It has been found to be a particular problem in cassava, maize, upland rice, tea, potato, coffee, cereals, sugarcane, orchards and vegetables cropping systems. It can become dominant under intensive cultivation systems where competing weeds are removed. There are conflicting reports of the reduction of yields, but maize yields may be reduced by 56%. The weed is also important in horticultural nurseries where it may infest the produce sold and lead to loss of reputation and, occasionally, to business closure. It is an alternate host of common maize rust (*P. sorghi*).

Flowers have pink petals and yellow centres with trifoliate leaves. (Photo by © Dick Culbert, www.flickr.com)



*O. latifolia* bulb with small daughter bulbs (bulbils). (Photo by © John Tann, www.flickr.com)



Scientific name(s) > **Oxalis latifolia**

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: All Countries



Authors: CABI. Edited by participants from Rwanda and Uganda at a workshop in Nairobi, February 2016  
CABI  
tel: +254 (0)20 2271000 email: africa@cabi.org

Edited by Plantwise