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Subject: Contact Dermatitis from Onion Weed Plant

A thirty-seven year old male who presented following contact dermatitis from Neobacrin Ophthalmic ointment mentioned that he also developed a rash whenever he handled the onion weed plant (*Allium triquetrum*). He said that after pulling the weed from his garden, after an hour or two, he developed marked swelling of the whole of his face, particularly the eyelids, and that this lasted for three to four days and then subsided spontaneously. As the rash did so the affected skin became crusted and desquamated. Itch was only slight. At the same time as the oedema appeared he developed coughing, sneezing and lacrimation. When the oedema was at its height there may have been weeping of the skin but he was not certain that this was not from lacrimation. Antihistamines were helpful in reducing the severity of attacks. When the plant flowered he suffered from hay fever.

Patch tests gave the following results:

| | <u>48 hours</u> | <u>96 hours</u> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Sap from stalk of plant | neg. | ++ |
| Flower | neg. | ++ |
| Leaf | neg. | + |

Control tests were not done on normal subjects but the negative responses at 48 hours were considered to indicate an allergic rather than a primary irritant response. Scratch tests for immediate type sensitivity were negative.

Previously the patient was able to handle onions and eat pickled ones without ill effects; however recently, after a period of not eating pickled onions he did so and almost immediately developed wheezing and a feeling of constriction in the throat. In the last few years, other than the above, he has not eaten any member of the onion family and was not aware of any untoward reaction to them other than that to the pickled onion.

Allium triquetrum was introduced into New Zealand as an ornamental flower and has since grown wild and is widespread here. Because it is so easily identified and because no previous case has been encountered allergy to it must be uncommon.

Dr. A. J. Rook (Cambridge) states that *Allium triquetrum* is a native plant of the western Mediterranean region. It was introduced into Britain many years ago and is a widespread and troublesome weed in the west of England, Channel Isles and South Wales. There can be few gardeners in these parts of the country who have not come into contact with it quite frequently. It is perhaps surprising that it has not previously been reported, as far as my records go, as a cause of dermatitis.