

Mesembryanthemum nodiflorum
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Up close, *Mesembryanthemum nodiflorum* (family Aizoaceae, common name ice plant) displays jewel-like leaves, pure white flowers with yellow stamens, and forms mats that cover the desert floor like a red tapestry. Extensive mats of *M. nodiflorum* grow just south and southwest of Phoenix, primarily on the Gila Indian reservation. Good examples are found along Riggs Road, just west of the I10 intersection. The crystalline appearance of the leaves is the result of epidermal bladder cell that contain concentrated salt solutions. Like many succulents, its redness increases with water stress. *M. nodiflorum* is native to the Namibian Desert and South Africa and is a recent introduction to Arizona, being first recorded in 1983 by researchers at the University of Arizona. In the United States, *M. nodiflorum* is a non-native invasive weed that threatens wild lands. It provides little for native foraging animals as its saltiness deters herbivory. It is also expected to alter soil chemistry by increasing surface salinity after death of the plant, which may interfere with germination and growth of native plants. Plant ecologists have mapped thousands of acres of this plant in some areas of Maricopa County. It is likely that this species has not yet reached its full extent and is expected to establish widely. Suitable habitats in the valley include disturbed areas, canals, agricultural areas, and alleys. Despite its intrinsic, up-close beauty this is unlikely a succulent we want in our collection. On the other hand, there are many interesting members of the family Aizoaceae that feature in our collections such as *Lithops* and *Oophytum*. Why can't these species escape and naturalize instead?