



# SCOTCH THISTLE

*Onopordum acanthium*



- \* Other names: Heraldic thistle, cotton thistle, wooly thistle
- \* Scotch Thistle is a Class B Designate noxious weed.
- \* An erect annual or biennial herb from the Asteraceae Family, Scotch thistle reproduces only by seed.
- \* Scotch thistle grows up to 8 feet in height and 6 feet in width. Stems have broad, spiny wings. Rosettes often grow from 1 to 2 feet in diameter. Leaves are up to 2 feet long and 1 foot wide and are covered with sharp yellow spines. Foliage has a bluish-green look, due to its thick mat of cotton-like hairs. Flower heads are up to 2 inches in diameter, dark pink to purple, and grow at the end of the leafy stalks as a single flower, or as a cluster of flowers. One of the distinguishing features of the Scotch thistle, are its long, stiff, needle-like bracts. Seeds are smooth, slender and tipped with bristles.

- \* Scotch thistle is confined to areas with an annual rainfall of 20 to 35 inches of rainfall annually. It drastically reduces native plant forage by outcompeting desirable species. It can be so thick that it becomes an impenetrable thorny barrier for livestock, wildlife, and people. It is responsible for lost wildlife habitats and recreation areas. Access to trails, stream banks and fishing areas can be completely cut off by the spread of scotch thistle.
- \* If eaten by stock the spines can cause injury to the animal particularly around the mouth. Spines and dead leaves contribute to faults in wool thereby decreasing its value.

## CONTROL OPTIONS

- \* Preventing seed production is the first line of defense for invasive species. Cut off all plant tops bearing flower heads or buds, and carefully bag and dispose of them in the garbage, do not compost.
- \* Because it reproduces by seed, Scotch Thistle can be controlled by mechanical, chemical and cultural methods. Severing the root of the rosette or plant, below the soil surface, will kill it. Small infestations can be pulled out by hand.



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\* Mowing makes the stand more uniform, which makes herbicide more effective, but mowing alone will not kill the plant. Applying herbicides to rosettes is also very effective.

\* Selective, translocated herbicides such as *aminopyralid* (used in Milestone, etc.) and *2, 4D plus dicamba* (used in Weedmaster) are two herbicides that are effective on Scotch Thistle. These herbicides will not harm grass and can be used around livestock provided all label precautions are followed.

\* When using herbicides, carefully read and follow all label instructions and obey all label precautions. (Note: pesticide product registration is renewed annually and product names and formulations may vary from year to year.)



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