



JVCWMA

People Working Together  
Toward a Common Goal

## JORDAN VALLEY COOPERATIVE WEED MANAGEMENT AREA Organized to Prevent and Manage Noxious Weeds

# Scotch Thistle

Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*) also called Scotch cotton thistle or cotton thistle.

**Life Span:** Biennial

**Origin:** Native to Europe and Asia.

**Growth Characteristics:** Biennial, sometimes annual, erect, up to 8 ft. tall. Rosette forms first year, flowering stem elongates second year.

**Flowers:** Flowers are arranged in heads up to 2 inches in diameter, generally with one head per branch, but can range from 2 to 7 heads, with flower color ranging from white to purple. The stems and flower heads can persist through the winter making infestations detectable in the subsequent year.

**Fruit/Seeds:** The seeds are spatula-like in shape with 4 to 5 angles and without hairs. Seeds are a mottled brown to nearly black.

**Leaves:** Robust spiny leaves with white woolly hairs that give them a grey cast. The leaf outline is egg shaped to narrow spatula shaped, but the general outline is interrupted by irregular spiny teeth along the leaf margin. Leaf length varies between 4 and 20 inches long, and the leaves are arranged in an alternate pattern along the stem.

**Stems:** The stem has spiny "wings" running down the stem.

**Roots:** Large fleshy taproot.

**Other:** Produces by seed only.

**Habitat:** Rangeland, dry pastures, roadsides, riparian areas and disturbed areas.

**Economic Importance:** Scotch thistle is a weed problem on western rangeland that produces significant economic losses for ranches. Infestations of Scotch thistle reduce forage production and virtually prohibit land utilization for livestock. Dense stands of the large, spiny plants constitute a barrier to livestock movement, almost totally excluding animals from grazing and access to water.



**History:** Scotch thistle has been credited with helping Scotland fend off Viking invasion. As the Vikings moved into Scotland for a sneak attack, they yelled out in pain when they stumbled through thistle plants. Their cries alerted the Scots and allowed them to push out the Vikings. Since then, Scotch thistle has been the national emblem of Scotland. Scotch thistle was probably introduced to North America as an ornamental plant in the late nineteenth century.

### Control

**Cultural:** Healthy desirable plant competition is important in controlling Scotch thistle.

**Mechanical:** Hoeing, pulling, and digging can control Scotch thistle. *Leave no leaves attached.*

**Chemical Treatment:**

**2,4-D:** Spring before bolt or Fall rosette.

**Glyphosate:** Spring before bolt or Fall rosette.

**Milestone:** Rosette to bolt. Use higher rate at bolting.

**Telar:** Use a surfactant; actively growing rosette.

**Escort:** Use a surfactant; actively growing rosette.

**Banvel:** Spring before bolt or Fall rosette.

*Always read and follow label directions on any chemicals.*

*It's the law!*



Photos courtesy of  
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Oregon State University

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