Musk Thistle Fact Sheet

Carduus nutans *Asteraceae* Family

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Distinguishing Features:

❶ **Flowers**: Plants have large disk shaped, showy red to purple flower heads, that droop when mature.
❷ **Seeds**: A single plant can produce up to 120,000 seeds annually, with seeds remaining viable in the soil up to 5 years.
❸ **Leaves**: Very spiny stems and leaves. Stems have a winged appearance.
❹ **Flowering Time**: June - September.
❺ **Life cycle/ other**: Biennial growing up to 6 feet tall.

Norman E. Rees, USDA Agricultural Research Service

Impacts:

- Musk thistle is continuous throughout the United States. It invades many types of habitats but is a serious threat to pastures as it is unpalatable to livestock.
- Once established it spreads rapidly because of the large number of seeds produced.

Control:

- Prevention of this plant's invasion is the best form of management. Control plants before they flower and set seed.
- Control of these plants must include preventing new seed dispersal for up to 12 years.
- For small infestations the best method for removal is digging them out by hand.
- For larger infestations the use of herbicide on young plants in the rosette stage before flowering prevents seed set. Picloram and metsulfuron offer excellent control.
- In both small and large infestations, plant competition by seeding disturbed areas with desirable grass species is helpful for long-term management.
- Several biological control agents have been released but have varying degrees of effectiveness. The most widely introduced species is *Rhinocyllus conicus*s.

**Please visit our website for references sourcing this information.*

SALT LAKE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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