

Scotch Thistle (Cotton Thistle) Fact Sheet

Onopordum acanthium

Asteraceae Family



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Distinguishing Features:

- ❶ **Flowers:** Plants are covered with 1" spiny purple flowers.
- ❷ **Seeds:** Plants produce up to 6,000 seeds annually with seeds remaining viable in the soil up to 5 years.
- ❸ **Leaves:** Up to 2 ft long and covered in cottony/ woolly hairs with spines on the margins.
- ❹ **Flowering Time:** June - September.
- ❺ **Life cycle/ other:** Biennial growing up to 8 feet tall and 3 feet wide.

Impacts:

- Scotch thistle primarily invades disturbed lands.
- Its rapid growth and large size reduce available resources for smaller plants. It competes with and decreases desirable forage and can form a dense monoculture stand.
- It can act as a living barbed-wire fence, preventing livestock and wildlife access to feed and water.

Control:

- Prevention of this plant's invasion is the best management. Control plants before they flower and set seed.
- Control of these plants must include preventing new seed dispersal for 6 years.
- For small infestations the best method for removal is digging plants out by hand.
- For larger infestations the use of herbicide on young plants is effective 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 that will compete for resources but not be affected by the broad leaf herbicides is best for long-term management.



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*Please visit our website for references sourcing this information.



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