



Medium Risk / Impact
in all regions of the Okanagan

Limited distribution with potential
to spread further.

Scotch Thistle

Onopordum acanthium

AKA: Cotton thistle, Scots thistle, Scottish thistle, heraldic thistle, woolly thistle

DESCRIPTION

- Biennial or perennial; reaches heights of 1.5 - 3.0 m
- Flowers are pink to violet, 2.5-5 cm in diameter, with spine-tipped bracts
- Stems are numerous and branched with broad, spiny wings and woolly hairs
- Normally forms dense stands
- Leaves are alternate, very large, and irregularly lobed with sharp yellow spikes
- Foliage has grey-green colour due to a thick mat of cotton-like or woolly hairs covering upper and lower surfaces

Scotch thistle produces a large, ground level rosette in the first year and bolts into a tall, spiny plant during its second year. Flowering occurs from mid-June to September, depending on location. Individual plants can produce 70-100 flowering heads, each containing 100 - 140 seeds. Seeds may remain viable in the soil for over 30 years. Seeds spread by wind, water, animals, clothing, and also in hay.



HABITAT

Scotch thistle is found at lower elevations along roadsides and disturbed areas. It also grows in irrigation ditches and on rangelands. In British Columbia, Scotch thistle has been confirmed across the southeast and south-central part of the province.

LOOK-A-LIKES



Scotch thistle closely resembles the **wavy-leafed thistle**

(*Cirsium undulatum*), but this native thistle is typically smaller (it does not exceed 1.2 m), and basal leaves are considerably smaller (3.0-7.0 cm long).

IMPACT AND RISKS

- Scotch thistle can compete with desirable plant and forage species.
- Can reduce wildlife habitats and form dense stands that are impenetrable to livestock.
- Access to stream banks, hiking trails, and fishing areas can be reduced.

PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

The most effective way to ensure that your lands do not become infested with Scotch thistle is by prevention. Here are some recommendations to prevent invasion on your property:

- Maintain your crops and natural lands in a healthy, vigorous condition to ensure a competitive plant community; competitive perennial grasses and forbs utilize water and nutrients that would otherwise be readily available to thistle.
- Follow a well-designed grazing management plan; excessive livestock grazing reduces competition and favours invasive plants.
- Regularly patrol your property for Scotch thistle plants and immediately control or remove infestations before seed set.
- Cooperate with adjacent landowners and encourage them to prevent Scotch thistle spread.
- Immediately re-vegetate disturbed, bare soils with a suitable seed mixture that provides dense, early colonization to prevent weed invasion.
- Clean your vehicles and machinery of plant material and soil before leaving a Scotch thistle infestation, or any other invasive plant infestation.
- Do not move contaminated soils to a new area.



TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL

- Hand pulling can be effective for managing small infestations.
- Protective clothing is required because Scotch thistle has strong spines.
- Mowing or hand-cutting are usually most effective in combination with other methods. Plants can re-grow from severed roots, and cut stems may still produce viable seed.
- Chemical control is also an option. Before applying herbicides, read the label for full use and precautionary instructions.
- For further information on the selection and application of chemicals to protect your crop, contact AgriService BC at 1-888-221-7141 or email AgriServiceBC@gov.bc.ca

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