



# SCOTCH THISTLE

(*Onopordum acanthium*)

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?** Scotch thistle is an aggressive plant which may form stands so dense that they create a natural barrier to livestock. Scotch thistle, a biennial, lives for two growing seasons. Seeds usually germinate in the late fall. During its first year, scotch thistle produces a rosette (a clump of leaves at ground level) with a thick, fleshy taproot that may extend down 1 foot or more. Early in the second year, the plant starts to form a flower stalk that can grow up to 12 feet tall. Leaves are large (up to 2 feet long and 1 foot wide), spiny and covered on both

sides with fine woolly hairs, giving the plant a silvery-gray look. The stems have vertical rows of prominent, spiny, ribbon-like leaf material or “wings” that extend to the base of the flower heads.

**WHERE DOES IT LIKE TO GROW?** Scotch thistle thrives in sunny, moist areas along rivers and streams but can also be found in pastures, fields and along roadsides. It prefers light, well-drained, sandy or stony soils.

**WHEN DOES IT BLOOM?** Flower heads develop in midsummer generally with one head at the tip of a branch but can have as many as 7 heads per branch. Flower heads are globe shaped, upright, intensely spiny and up to 2 inches in diameter. Purple flowers appear July through September.

**HOW DOES IT SPREAD?** Scotch thistle reproduces only by seed. Each plant can produce 8,400 to 40,000 seeds. Unless the seeds are physically moved by wind, water, humans, livestock, wildlife or found in infested hay and straw, they do not spread very far from the parent plant.



## NON-CHEMICAL CONTROL

- Small infestations can be dug by hand. Be sure to cut the plant off below the soil surface.
- Since this plant reproduces only by seed, prevent seed production by cutting or mowing the plant before it flowers. Keep checking for new rosettes throughout the growing season and treat as necessary. Seed banks will be present for years.
- Establishing and maintaining a thick, vigorous stand of grasses in your pasture can effectively prevent scotch thistle seeds from germinating.
- Goats will graze young scotch thistle, reducing plant numbers and preventing seed production.

## CHEMICAL CONTROL

- Herbicides should be applied in the spring before scotch thistle begins to form its flower stalk, or in the fall to the new rosettes.

Want more information? Contact:

**Kootenai County Noxious Weed Control**

**10905 N. Ramsey Road**

**Hayden, ID 83835**

**208-446-1290 / TTY 208-446-2145**

**kcnoxiousweeds@kcgov.us or [www.kcweeds.com](http://www.kcweeds.com)**

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