

MUSK THISTLE

Carduus nutans

Asteraceae, the sunflower family

Category: Control

Norman E. Rees, USDA Agricultural Research Service - Retired, Bugwood.org

FACTSHEET INFORMATION

Summary of Invasiveness

- Musk thistle is an invasive plant that is thought to have an allelopathic effect, inhibiting the growth of nearby species and reducing biodiversity.
- It reduces animal production by preventing animals from eating plants growing near infestations, suppressing the growth of desirable forage vegetation, and dried fragments and spines can cause physical injury or adhere to wool, lowering its value.

Description

- Biennial or winter annual that can grow up to 6 feet tall.
- Plants exist as basal rosettes until flowering stems develop.
- Deeply lobed basal leaves have prickly toothed margins and stem leaves are alternate, reduced, and sparsely haired.
- Plant has prickly winged stems.
- Purple to pink disk flowers, 1½–3 inches in diameter, are solitary at the stem tips, often nodding, with spine-tipped bracts surrounding the flowerhead.
- Yellowish-brown seeds have hairlike plume.

Introduction and Movement

- Musk thistle is native to Eurasia and was introduced to the U.S. in 1853 within ship's ballast dumped at Camden, New Jersey.
- It inhabits rangeland, pastures, stream banks, and roadsides.
- The seed pappus allows for easy dispersal by the wind however, seeds can also be spread by seed heads attaching to the fleeces of passing sheep and as a contaminant of pasture and crop seed.

Prevention Strategy

- To prevent accidental introductions, learn how to identify Musk thistle and eradicate infestations on your property.
- Always remove and properly dispose of all seed and plant materials on vehicles, clothing, shoes and pets before you exit or enter outdoor recreational sites.
- Always Remember To: **KNOCK IT OFF!**

Sources

- CABI Invasive Species Compendium: <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/11259>
- Idaho's Noxious Weeds 9th Edition, University of Idaho: <http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/BUL/BUL816.pdf>.



Steve Dewey, Utah State University, Bugwood.org



Bruce Ackley, The Ohio State University, Bugwood.org



Norman E. Rees, USDA Agricultural Research Service - Retired, Bugwood.org

MUSK THISTLE DISTRIBUTION MAP

