



Milk Thistle

Scientific Name:	<i>Silybum marianum</i>
Year Listed:	1989
Weed Class:	A
Requirement:	Eradication
Other Names:	Variegated Thistle
Native To:	W. Asia, N. Africa, Europe
Toxicity:	Toxic to Livestock

Why is it a noxious weed?

Milk Thistle is an aggressive invader that threatens native vegetation and beneficial forage. It is a prolific seeder and forms dense stands. Ingestion of milk thistle by grazing animals causes nitrate poisoning, which can be lethal.

How would I identify it?

General Description

Milk thistle is a sparsely branched thistle growing up to 6 feet tall with distinctively patterned green and white leaves.

Flower Description

Flowerheads are large and rounded, occurring at stem tips. Flowers are purple with leathery, spine-tipped bracts at the base arranged in overlapping rows with spreading tips.

Leaf Description

The leaves are alternate, deeply lobed, have pointed tips. They are shiny dark green with conspicuous white marbling. Basal leaves can be 20 inches long and 10 inches wide.

Stem Description

The stems are stout, rigid, and branching. They end in a solitary composite flower.

Fruit/Seed Description

Seeds are hairless and about 1/4 inch long.

Where does it grow?

Milk Thistle occurs on fertile lands of improved pastures that have been overgrazed and poorly managed. It is found in dense stands along roads, in waste areas, pastures, ditches and disturbed areas.

How does it reproduce?

Seed.



How do I control Milk Thistle?

The most effective way to manage weed infestations is to research, plan for, and use a combination of prevention and control methods specific to the problem weed. This approach is called **I**ntegrated **W**eed **M**anagement (IWM), which uses mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical control methods that effectively treat the problem weed yet protect human health, habitat, water, and other natural resources.

IWM Control Method	Effectiveness of Control Method			Timing and Notes **
	Good	Fair	Poor	
Digging	G			Effective in spring when size is manageable.
Hand-Pulling	G			Effective before soil dries out. Wear thick leather gloves! Grab at ground level to avoid breakage.
Mowing			P	Mowing is not effective. Also, plants that have been mowed are more palatable, and therefore more dangerous to livestock.
Tilling		F		Till at least three inches deep. May need to be tilled several times a year.
Bark Mulch		F		Not effective as a sole control method, but will reduce germination. Class 'A' weeds require eradication; mulch alone will not eradicate.
Black Plastic		F		Leave in place for several years.
Cover Crop			P	Not effective as a sole control method. First till or apply herbicide.
Native Plant Restoration		F		Not effective as a sole control method. Milk thistle does best in sunny locations. A dense shrub or tree layer can provide some control.
Managed Grazing			P	Class 'A' Weeds require eradication; grazing will not eradicate. Goats are reported to graze milk thistle without ill effects but caution is warranted; keep all other livestock from eating. Can cause nitrate poisoning.
Weed-Feeding Insects				None.
Herbicides - (Examples*)		<i>Timing is Important! For most effective control, apply herbicides before plants bloom.</i>		
Aminopyralid	Milestone	G		Apply in spring or early summer to rosettes or bolting plants. A fall application to seedlings and rosettes is also effective.
Glyphosate	Roundup		P	Glyphosate alone is often not effective on milk thistle.
Triclopyr combinations	Crossbow	G		Crossbow brand herbicide is more effective on milk thistle than products that contain only triclopyr. Apply in spring to rosettes. A fall application to seedlings and rosettes is also effective.

*Brand names are listed as examples only. Other products may contain the listed chemical. Clark County does not endorse any product or brand name. Always read and follow the herbicide label.

****Timing of control is critical!** Herbicide treatments are often not effective or appropriate when plants are in flower. If the weeds have produced seed, bag the plants and place in garbage, not compost. Regardless of control method chosen, multiple treatments may be needed each year. For more information on IWM, specific herbicides, and timing of control, please contact the Weed Board at:



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