

# Scotch thistle

*Onopordum acanthium* L. Sunflower Family

## Key identifying traits

- ❑ Very large thistle growing up to 8 feet tall
- ❑ Stems have broad spiny wings
- ❑ Leaves are spiny and covered with fine dense hair
- ❑ Hairy leaf surface causes a grayish appearance
- ❑ Flower heads numerous, 1 to 2 inches in diameter
- ❑ Flowers violet to reddish; bracts taper to a spine
- ❑ Upper leaves alternate and coarsely lobed
- ❑ Basal leaves up to 2 feet long and 1 foot wide

## Biology and ecology

- Tap-rooted biennial that reproduces by seed
- Invades roadsides, range and disturbed areas
- Thrives in sunny sites - but can tolerate shade
- Up to 50,000 seeds per plant; seeds viable 6-15 years
- Repeated branching may result in plants 5' wide
- Dense stands can create barriers that restrict livestock
- Drought tolerant but can flourish along open streams

## Control

*Prevention*- Learn to identify the plant; know your property; beware of fill dirt, hay, manure and seed from outside your area

*Biological* - No known biological controls

*Cultural* - Competitive vegetation helps reduce open spaces for invasion

*Mechanical* - Mowing can stop seed production in short term, but plants can regrow; digging cutting and cultivation are effective; monitor for new growth season long; seed bank will remain for years

*Chemical* - Several effective at label rates; best timing is in early spring when plants are in rosette stage and again in fall when more rosettes germinate

*Where found*- Scattered small infestations, particularly in old barnyards as well as some sites covering several acres over pasture/range ground in the northern half of the county.



*a yard stick on a Scotch thistle rosette*