

Cotton thistle

Onopordum acanthium

Family Asteraceae



Identification

- Leaves whitish, grey-blue/green with woolly stems.
- Leaves large, oblong and spiny.
- Stems erect with yellow spiny wings extending from the leaves.
- Large solitary purple-red flower heads.
- Flowers December to February.
- Plant starts from a rosette of divided leaves with spiny margins.



Cotton thistle flowering Photo: B. Keenan (ECan)



A young cotton thistle Photo: C. Howell (DOC)

Status

Cotton thistle has no legal control requirements in Canterbury.

Control

Eradicate this plant before it becomes established. Grubbing out the plants is a successful control method. Check and grub all known sites at least twice during the growing season to ensure no seeds are produced.

Chemical control can be used for larger infestations. Consult your local agri-chemical supplier or the current agri-chemical manual for advice. Use all herbicides in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other plants, the soil or waterways.

Where is it found?

Cotton thistle grows in dry pasture, shingle and wastelands. It is dispersed by wind, livestock and water. Cotton thistle has been present in the drier regions of Otago and the Hawkes Bay. There are a few known limited distribution sites in the Canterbury region.

Why is it a problem?

Cotton thistle can invade and colonise pastures. Overseas, cotton thistle has been known to form dense stands preventing livestock movement and excluding access for stock to grazing and water.



Cotton thistle infestation-at least 2 m tall Photo: B. Keenan (ECan)