

Saffron thistle

Carthamus lanatus

Family Asteraceae



Identification

- Up-right thistle that can grow up to 1 m tall.
- Seeds germinate in autumn. The leaves grow out from the centre to form a rosette.
- In late spring/early summer, a single stem grows from the rosette. Over time, the rosette leaves disappear and the stem divides into many branches.
- The glossy, dark green leaves have sharp-tipped spines.
- Yellow flowers with purplish veins appear from December to April (most other thistle species have pink/purple flowers).



Saffron thistle. Photo: Plant Protection Society.



Saffron thistle. Photo: Plant Protection Society.

Where is it found?

Saffron thistle prefers cropping land, pasture and wasteland to grow in. Saffron thistle is known to occur in localised areas in Canterbury.

Why is it a problem?

Once established, saffron thistle can form dense stands, preventing stock movement. It can also compete with pasture species, reducing carrying capacity. The sharp spines can cause injuries to the eyes and mouths of stock and get stuck in wool.

Saffron thistle spreads easily. The large seeds can be carried by stock, water, vehicles and in dirt to other locations. The whole plant can also break off at the base and be blown for long distances, further spreading seed. Seed can remain viable in the soil for up to 8 years.

Status

Saffron thistle is a 'Total Control' plant under Canterbury's Regional Pest Management Strategy (2005-2015). The aim is to eradicate saffron thistle from Canterbury. For more information on the strategy rules, visit www.ecan.govt.nz

Have you seen it?

If you think you have found saffron thistle, please contact Environment Canterbury or the Potential Pest Line on (03) 363 9380 immediately. Environment Canterbury will carry out all control work on saffron thistle.



Saffron thistle flowers and seeds. Photo: Hawkes Bay Regional Council.