



Weed of the Month: Scotch Thistle

Welcome to our "Weed of the Month" feature, designed to raise awareness about the impact of noxious invasive weeds on our environment. This month, we're focusing on Scotch Thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), an aggressive plant species that poses a significant threat to native ecosystems and agricultural lands.



Identification:

Scotch Thistle, also known as Cotton Thistle, is a biennial or short-lived perennial with distinctive spiny leaves that also spread to the stems. The wings of the leaves are also covered in fine cottony hairs. It produces showy purple flowers that form in both clusters and in singles. Scotch Thistle seeds poke out of the flower heads topped with feathery hairs that develop into a large cottony tuft which is where it gets the name Cotton Thistle.



Invasive Behavior:

Originating from Europe and Western Asia, Scotch Thistle has become very invasive to many parts of North America. It thrives in a variety of disturbed habitats including river and stream corridors, roadsides, pastures, and abandoned cropland. It only reproduces by seeds that can germinate year-round and are drought resistant.

Top Left- Close up image of Scotch Thistle flower

Top Right- Scotch Thistle flower heads in early bloom and late bloom.

Impact:

The presence of Scotch Thistle can have serious ecological and economic consequences. Because a large population of the seeds stay dormant in the soil, it makes the eradication process very long. Severe infestations can form tall, dense, impenetrable stands. This reduces forage quality for livestock and wildlife posing challenges for farmers and ranchers.



Middle Bottom-
Scotch Thistle
seedlings.

Bottom Right-
Scotch Thistle
infestation.





Control and Management:

Effectively managing Scotch Thistle is a time sensitive process. Early detection and rapid response are crucial. Mechanical methods are most effective in small infestations by digging and severing the root below the soil surface. Herbicides may be necessary for established populations and can be applied at most growth stages depending on the herbicide. This practice should be used judiciously to minimize impact on non-target species.

Prevention:

Preventing the spread of Scotch Thistle is key to its control. Routinely inspect and maintain your property for any signs of this invader. Be vigilant for any signs of this weed in your area and report sightings to the Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office at **(530) 822-7500**.

Top Left- Adult Scotch Thistle's height in correlation to the average human.

Bottom Right- Scotch Thistle stem.

By staying informed and taking proactive measures, we can work together to curb the spread of Scotch Thistle and protect our native ecosystems. Join us next month for a new "Weed of the Month" feature, where we'll highlight another noxious invasive plant and share tips on how to address it.



For more information about Scotch Thistle, feel free to visit the California Invasive Plant Council website at: <https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/onopordum-acanthium-profile/>

For more information about our other county programs, visit our website at: <https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/agricultural-department>

Thank you for your dedication to preserving our environment and agricultural land!

- Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office

