

Clallam County Noxious Weed Alert

Italian thistle

Carduus pycnocephalus

Class A Noxious Weed
Eradication Required

Identification

- Italian thistle is a winter annual that typically germinates in the fall, overwinters as a rosette and flowers in the spring
- Entire plant is spiny and can grow from just a few inches tall to up to 6-8 feet
- Flowers are purple, narrow and occur at the tip of the stems
- Has stiff spines (bracts) at the base of the flowers that point upward
- Leaves are green with light white mottling and have cobweb-like hairs on the back and a prominent spine at the end of the leaf
- Stems are winged and spiny



Impacts

Italian thistle has invaded some isolated pasturelands and gravel storage areas in Clallam County, creating dense stands that outcompete with desirable foliage and prevent movement and grazing.



Reproduction

Italian thistle reproduces by seed only. Seeds rarely persist for more than a few years in the soil.

Look-a-likes

Milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*), a class A noxious weed, and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), a class C noxious weed, can both look similar to Italian thistle.

Milk thistle, which is also required for eradication, has white mottling on the leaf, similar to Italian thistle, but milk thistle leaves are darker green and the mottling is more pronounced.



Canada thistle does not have white mottling on the leaves, and lacks the spike-winged stems found on Italian thistle.



Control Methods

General: Gloves should be worn when removing Italian thistle. Spines are very sharp.

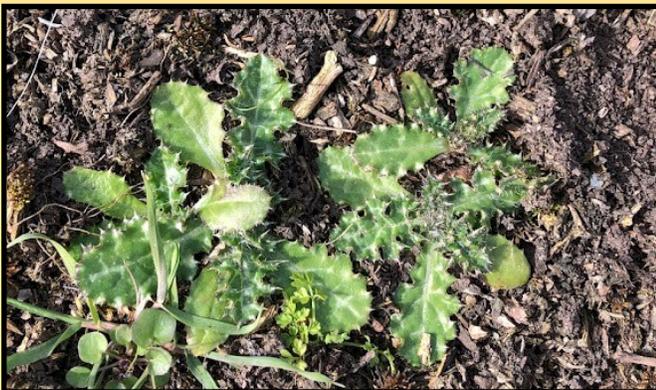
Eradication often takes a couple of years, so checking infestations multiple times a year is necessary.

Mechanical: Small infestations can be hand-pulled or dug up. Plants should be bagged and thrown away. Do not compost. For larger infestations, tilling can kill growing Italian thistle plants.

Cultural: Italian thistle does not compete well with healthy established plants, so seeding with competitive vegetation can help reduce infestations.

Chemical: Please follow all regulations and labels when applying herbicides. Always wear personal protective gear (PPE) when using herbicides. In some cases, such as treatment in or around standing water, a permit or special license is required. Adding a surfactant to the herbicide mix is recommended, as it increases herbicide absorption into the plant. Do not cut or mow plants right before or for 2 weeks after application to allow the plant to absorb the herbicide. Please refer to the herbicide label for livestock and hay restrictions. Chemically treated plants can become more palatable to livestock when plants begin to wilt. Successful treatments will depend on the treatment location, site specifications, timing, and weather. **For more information about herbicides or site specific use, please contact the Noxious Weed Control Board.**

***For best control of Italian thistle, treat when plants emerge in fall or are rapidly growing in the late winter and early spring before flower buds form.**



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