

Artichoke Thistle (*Cynara cardunculus*)

DECLARED NOXIOUS WEED

REGIONALLY CONTROLLED IN PORT PHILLIP EAST



ISSUE

Artichoke thistle is a common pasture and environmental weed in south-eastern Australia. Originating from the Mediterranean region, this weed has easily adapted to conditions in much of Victoria. Large infestations have been historically located on the heavy basalt soils of the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne.

Currently vast areas of land in the City of Whittlesea are affected by artichoke thistle. Without ongoing management this invasive plant can rapidly degrade pastures, reducing agricultural productivity. Artichoke thistle can also shade out desirable plants, leaving dead patches of ground when they die back completely over the cooler months. Over time these bare patches of ground increase in size,

ultimately resulting in areas of poorer quality. Native grasslands and open woodlands are also at risk of invasion.

Artichoke thistle is also drought hardy and provides little benefit to livestock. Where it dominates pastures, nitrate poisoning of livestock can occur if alternative feed is not provided. In extreme cases this type of poisoning can result in the death of stock.

LOCAL SCENE

Artichoke thistles are often locally called 'arties'. They are also incorrectly called Scotch thistle. Current infestation levels are moderate with dense pockets found on basalt soils. It is a fairly common weed in the southern rural zone of the municipality, however most infestations are manageable and can be eradicated in the longer term.

Within the City of Whittlesea artichoke thistle is most commonly found in:

- Beveridge
- Donnybrook
- Doreen
- Epping
- Mernda
- Wollert
- Woodstock

PROBLEM LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Some land management practices contribute to the spread of weeds. Landowners can unintentionally spread artichoke thistles by:

- Disturbing soil and creating bare ground
- Overgrazing of stock
- Importing soil or fill that is contaminated with weed seed
- Bringing dirty machinery onto the property that contains weed seed
- Careless disposal of flowers and seed heads

Selecting the most suitable control technique is crucial. Integrating a number of weed control techniques is often most effective in the longer term. An important part of any weed

management program is to maintain control and prevent re-infestation. Re-planting the treated area with desirable plants and regular monitoring is essential to prevent re-infestation.

Refer to the City's 'Seasonal Guide to Weed Management' for more information on integrated weed control options.

Visit www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au (key word search: seasonal guide) or email Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au for your copy of the Guide.

You may also contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer on (03) 9217 2493 for further weed advice or for a copy of the Guide.

CONTACTS

Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)

www.apvma.gov.au
Tel. (02) 6272 5852

City of Whittlesea Sustainability Planning Unit

www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au
Tel. (03) 9217 2493

Department of Primary Industries (DPI)

www.dpi.vic.gov.au
Tel. 136 186

DPI Chemical Information Service

www.dpi.vic.gov.au
Tel. (03) 9210 9379

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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Flower: Large, round, light green-grey prickly flower buds (see Photo 1), up to 15cm in diameter. Buds open into large purple flowerheads in summer (see Photos 2 and 4). Up to 16 flowers or more, depending on plant vigour, are borne on a single, long stem, up to 1.5-2m tall. In some conditions plants may produce flowers in the first year of growth, however these are normally produced in the second year.

Seeds: Once mature, the flower develops into a large white fluffy seed-head (see Photo 3). Each plant is capable of producing in excess of 1,600 grey sunflower-like seeds per flowering season. The majority of seeds are usually carried a short distance on a white fluffy appendage called a pappus, commonly known as a "fairy". Fairies can often be seen drifting on hot northerly winds during late summer.

Leaves: Large, prickly leaves, often light green-grey in colouration, although can be slightly darker when growing on fertile land. The leaves are also distinctly deeply divided and covered in a fine downy material (see Photo 5).

In areas where there is ample water and nutrients the plants can develop leaves measuring up to 1m in length. However, in the City of Whittlesea, the plants are generally less vigorous in growth, with leaves averaging between 30-50cm in length.

Form: Deep-rooted, biennial/perennial plant growing from a central point. The leaves form a circular pattern often referred to as a rosette (see Photo 6). The plants begin to appear in late autumn-spring. Each year these plants die back to a large deep-rooted underground rootstock.

FURTHER READING

Blood, K (2001) *Environmental weeds: a field guide for SE Australia*, C H Jerram Science Publishers, Mt Waverley.

Keith Turnbull Research Institute (February 1998) *Landcare Notes: Artichoke thistle*, LC0191, Frankston.

Parsons, W.T. & Cuthbertson, E.G. (1992) *Noxious Weeds of Australia*, Inkata Press, Melbourne.

DISCLAIMER

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