

## WHITTLESEA WEED FACT SHEET

# Scotch/Heraldic Thistle

(*Onopordum acanthium*)



DECLARED NOXIOUS WEED

REGIONALLY PROHIBITED IN PORT PHILLIP EAST



### ISSUE

Scotch thistle is mainly found in New South Wales, with only small infestations in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. Within Victoria, infestations of Scotch thistle are primarily in areas where there is higher rainfall, such as Gippsland.

With the ability to spread rapidly, especially where conditions such as over-grazing of pastures favour Scotch thistle, it can easily become the dominant plant in paddocks. Where it is allowed to establish, landowners face a long battle to control and eliminate this weed. Its long-lived seeds can lay dormant in the soil for many years until ideal conditions arise.

### LOCAL SCENE

This weed is not commonly found in Greater Melbourne. Historically, Scotch thistle has been found in Mernda, Wollert and Woodstock. Today it is rarely found growing on properties in the City of Whittlesea, however a few small pockets reveal themselves from time to time.

More commonly, the plants many landowners call Scotch thistle are actually spear or slender/shore thistle. These plants look similar to the true Scotch thistle and are often found growing in the same areas, i.e. heavy, dark, cracking clay soils, where moisture is more readily available.

Within the City of Whittlesea there is currently only one known infestation of Scotch thistle. However, if landowners believe they have an infestation, they should contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer in order to correctly identify the plant (details below).

### PROBLEM LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Some land management practices contribute to the spread of weeds. Landowners can unintentionally spread Scotch 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 is contaminated with soil/or weedy material
- Careless disposal of flowers and seed heads
- Failing to implement an adequate replacement strategy

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 remain vigilant and prevent re-infestation. Re-planting the treated area with desirable plants and regular monitoring of the area 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](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au) (key word search: seasonal guide) or email [Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au) for your copy of the Guide.

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

### CONTACTS

#### **Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)**

[www.apvma.gov.au](http://www.apvma.gov.au)  
Tel. (02) 6272 5852

#### **City of Whittlesea Sustainability Planning Unit**

[www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au)  
Tel. (03) 9217 2493

#### **Department of Primary Industries (DPI)**

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)  
Tel. 136 186

#### **DPI Chemical Information Service**

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)  
Tel. (03) 9210 9379

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## IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Scotch thistle is often mistaken for other thistles, particularly spear thistle. To find this weed you will need to become familiar with a few key identification features described below.

**Flowers:** Irregularly round, purple, thistle-like flowers (Photo 1) growing on a rigid stems to 1m tall. Flower-heads have numerous sharp orange-brown spines that encase the flower and seeds. Flowers grow either singly or in groups of 1-2 flower-heads at the end of the stem (Photo 2). Flowering usually occurs from December to February, however this is subject to rainfall.

**Seeds:** When flowers have died back, small, curved and ridged/wrinkled grey seeds develop, approximately 2mm in length. The majority of seeds are carried a relatively short distance on a white fluffy appendage called a pappus, commonly known as a fairy. Seeds can also spread when fairies attach to clothing and livestock. Each plant is capable of producing in excess of 20,000 seeds per flowering season. Seeds can remain viable in the ground for up to 20 years.

**Leaves:** Large, downy, silvery-green leaves that are deeply divided and are covered in numerous, sharp, orange-brown spines (Photo 3). The leaves appear to be woolly as they are covered in a fine down (Photo 4). Leaves can grow to 30-40cm in length.

**Form:** Scotch thistle is a deep-rooted, biennial plant growing from a central point. The leaves form a circular pattern, often referred to as a rosette (Photos 5 & 6). True Scotch thistles have distinct papery, leaf-like extensions that are 3cm or more in width, running down the length of the flowering stem (Photos 7 & 8). Other thistles may have this keel, however they are less prominent.

Scotch thistle is an adaptive plant, having the ability to grow throughout the year. However, they mostly appear during seasonal breaks, when reliable rainfall occurs e.g. late summer-early autumn and late winter-early spring.

## FURTHER READING:

W.T. Parsons & E.G. Cuthbertson, CSIRO Publishing (2001)  
*Noxious Weeds of Australia- Second Edition*

Keith Turnbull Research Institute, Frankston (February 1998) *Landcare Notes: Scotch thistle LC0176*

## DISCLAIMER

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