

Weed of The Week:

Musk thistle

(*Carduus nutans*)



Weed description:

Musk thistle belongs to the Aster family and is native to Europe and Eastern Asia. This biennial will grow to heights of 2 to 6 feet. Its leaves are large, deep green in color, with a prominent light green midrib. Its spines are large, 3 to 6 inches in length. Flowers are purple and about the size of a racquetball. As these flowers mature they begin to nod, which is why this weed is also called nodding thistle. This weed reproduces only by seed and has a large, fleshy taproot.

Distribution:

Musk thistle is widespread throughout Arapahoe County, infesting waste areas, roadsides, railroad rights-of-way and other disturbed areas. However, it doesn't seem to be as troublesome in areas where native vegetation is doing well. It can still become established in these areas though. This plant can be found throughout Colorado and much of the United States.



Why is it a problem?

Rangeland, pastures and grasslands are all affected by musk thistle because it decreases the amount of usable forage for grazing animals. It can also reduce land value, reduce wildlife habitat and forage, displace native plants, and decrease native plant and animal diversity. By displacing native plants and animals, dense infestations threaten natural ecosystems and nature reserves by fragmenting sensitive plant and animal habitat. Seed production and rate of spread is a concern with this weed, a mature plant can produce up to 200,000 seeds, making control or even containment difficult. This weed is also a problem because its thorns can injure livestock, wildlife and even humans.

If you would like more information contact:

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