

*Onopordum acanthium*  
**Scotch Thistle**

Other common names:  
cotton thistle

Asteraceae, the sunflower family  
Category: CONTAINMENT



### Diagnostic Characteristics

- Biennial; grows 6-12 feet tall
- A large spiny rosette develops during the first year
- Stems are erect and branched; conspicuous spiny wings that are continuous along the length of the stems
- Leaves are lobed with spiny margins that extend down stems as spiny wings
- Fine white hairs cover the entire plant giving it a grayish-green appearance
- Flower heads are purple, globe-shaped, and up to 2 inches wide with stiff, spiny bracts

### Background

- Native to Europe, introduced as an ornamental
- Inhabits rangelands, dry pastures, rights-of-way, waste areas, as well as river, stream, and canal banks
- Reproduces by seed and generally prefer moist sites or drainages in dry locations
- Can form tall, dense, impenetrable stands

Photo Credit:

Steve Dewey, Utah State University, Bugwood.org

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