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