

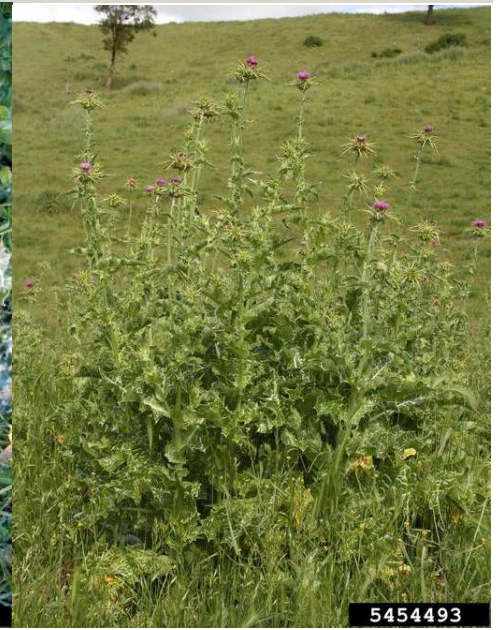
“B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant, but may have limited distribution in some counties

Milk thistle
Silybum marianum

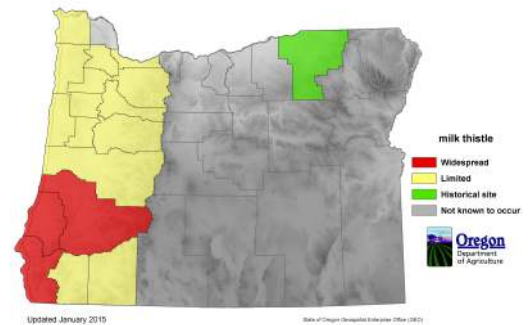
Other common names: Blessed thistle, St Mary’s thistle, lady’s thistle

USDA symbol: SIMA3
ODA rating: B



Introduction: Milk thistle is native to the Mediterranean region of Europe. With its large variegated leaves and large flower head, it is a standout in garden settings or in pastures. This robust plant has been known since ancient times as a medicinal plant for the treatment of liver diseases, disorders of the bile duct and spleen. Even today the seed is sold extensively in the herbal medicine trade.

Distribution in Oregon: The first record of milk thistle in Oregon is 1886 in Multnomah County. Today it is primarily a pest of western Oregon especially in Douglas County. Scattered populations are found throughout the Willamette Valley and south coast, often associated to livestock operations.



Description: Milk thistle is a biennial or winter annual blooming from April through July. It grows two to six feet tall. Stems are stout, rigid and generally branching. Leaves are very broad and clasp the flower stem. The spiny margins and white marbling along veins are very distinctive. Flower heads are reddish-purple, spine-tipped and 3-4 inches across. The seed is capable of remaining dormant in the soil for many years.

Impacts: Once established, it forms dense clumps that exclude livestock and crowd out more desirable forage species. Individual plants are so large that forage displacement is high. It has invaded extensive pastureland acres in Douglas County though biocontrol agents have reduced their impact significantly. It is a nitrate accumulator, lethal when livestock ingest the plant though they avoid the sharp spines. It infests roadsides, waste and disturbed areas, grazing lands and often occurs in association with Italian and slender-flowered thistles.

Biological controls: One approved biocontrol agent, *Rhinocyllus conicus* a seed head weevil, is well established in Oregon.

