

# Musk Thistle

**BOTANICAL NAME:** *Carduus nutans*

## WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Musk Thistle is distinguished from other thistles by its large solitary flower at the end of each branch of the stem. It forms a rosette of deeply lobed, spiny leaves and then bolts up to 6 or 7 feet tall. The stems are ribbed and have "spiny wings" up the sides. The flowers can be 3 inches across and often nod on the stem.

## WHERE DOES IT GROW?

Musk Thistle tolerates a wide range of soils. It invades open disturbed sites, roadsides, pastures, annual grasslands, and waste areas.

**WHY IS IT A NOXIOUS WEED?** Musk Thistle out-competes desirable vegetation, and animals won't graze in areas where it grows.

## HOW DO I CONTROL IT?

See the reverse side for specific information on mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical control options for Musk Thistle. Also see our Chemical Treatment handout for more information on using herbicides.

**WANT MORE INFORMATION?** Call:

**Kootenai County Noxious Weed Control**  
10905 N. Ramsey Road  
Hayden, ID 83835  
208-446-1290

[kcnoxiousweeds@kcgov.us](mailto:kcnoxiousweeds@kcgov.us) or [www.kcweeds.com](http://www.kcweeds.com)

*Kootenai County does not discriminate against individuals or groups on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment in, its public meetings, programs, or activities. Requests for assistance or accommodations can be arranged by contacting the Noxious Weed Control Department at (208) 446-1290 or County Administration Office TTY (208)446-2145 with 3 days advance notice.*



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# How to Control Musk Thistle

Musk Thistle is an annual or biennial that reproduces by seed only. Control is accomplished by preventing seed production.

**Mechanical** Mechanical control methods that prevent seed production can be very effective. Tillage is very effective in the rosette stage. Once plants have bolted you can dig them out, being sure to remove at least 2" of the root. If the plants have flowered and begun to produce seed, remove the seed heads and bag or burn them, then cut down or dig out the rest of the plant. Any seed heads that are not open when the plant is removed will not produce seed.

**Cultural** The best long term weed control is to get your desirable native plants thriving. A well-managed perennial grass pasture is much less likely to let Musk Thistle get established.

**Biological** The seed head weevil *Rhinocyllus conicus* helps reduce production of seeds. Contact Nez Perce Biocontrol Center for more information (208)843-9374 or [nezpercebiocontrol.com](http://nezpercebiocontrol.com).

**Chemical** \* See our *Chemical Treatment* handout for more information on using herbicides.

- **Aminopyralid** is the active ingredient in herbicide product such as **Milestone**. It is broadleaf selective (safe on grasses) and can be effective on Musk Thistle if applied in the rosette to bolting stages, and can also be effective during the bud stage if tank mixed with **2,4-D**.
- **Clopyralid** is the active ingredient in herbicide products such as **Transline**. It is broadleaf selective and also safe on most conifer trees. It can be effective on Musk Thistle if applied in spring during the rosette or bolting stage.
- **Fluroxypyr** is the active ingredient in herbicide products such as **Vista XRT**. It is broadleaf selective and can be effective on Musk Thistle if applied during in spring while the thistles are rapidly growing.
- **Metsulfuron Methyl** is the active ingredient in herbicide products such as **Escort XP**. It is safe on most grasses and can be effective on Musk Thistle if applied in the spring. When applied to bolting or budding plants it can eliminate seed development.

*Recommendations are based on University of Idaho Extension Bulletin 865 [Idaho's Noxious Weeds 2011 Control Guidelines Noncrop and Rangeland Sites](#), the book [Weed Control in Natural Areas in the Western United States](#) published by UC Davis Weed Research & Information Center, herbicide labels, and presentations by Ron Patterson of University of Idaho College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.*