

# “B” Rated Weeds

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

Italian thistle  
*Carduus pycnocephalus*

Other common names: Plymouth thistle, shore thistle, slender thistle

USDA symbol: CAPY2  
ODA rating: B



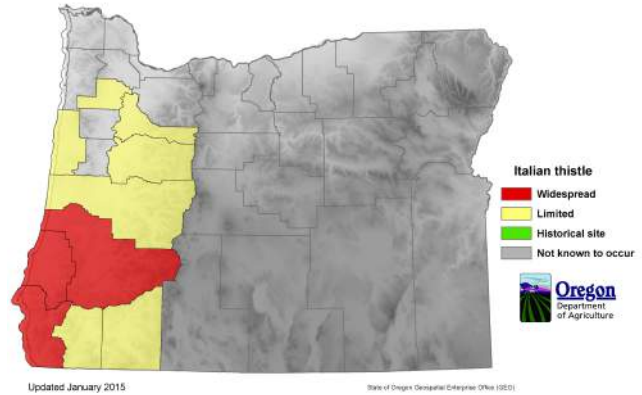
**Introduction:** Italian thistle is a prolific annual thistle known to inhabit pastures, roadsides and non-crop areas. Before the introduction of biocontrol agents that now suppress reproduction, Italian thistle was spreading rapidly throughout the Willamette Valley, Douglas County and the south coast. It is an early grower, flowering and setting seed early in the summer to capture available moisture.

**Distribution:** First record of this plant in Oregon was 1929 in Lane County. It found its best habitat to be the hillside pastures of Douglas County where tens of thousands of acres were infested. It is uncommon in the Willamette Valley and has now developed a foothold in Hells Canyon of NE Oregon.

**Description:** Annual or sometimes biennial, blooming May to June. It grows 1 to 4 feet tall. Stems have spiny wings. The leaves are deeply cut into 2 to 5 pairs lobes, with white variegation and a undersurface that is slightly woolly. Flowers are purplish to pinkish, borne in cylindrical heads either solitary or in clusters of more than 5. Flower bracts are hairy. Fruits from outer part of flower head are gray in color and inner portion are yellowish to tan.

**Impacts:** Large outbreaks form thickets of thistle stems seriously excluding forage production. These thickets can also form a physical barrier to livestock entry. Before the introduction of the seed weevil, control costs on large sheep operations were significant and marginally effective.

**Biological controls:** Two approved biocontrol agents, a seed head weevil and a stem-boring fly, have been successfully established in Oregon. They have made a significant impact on the thistle populations.



of



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[www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Weeds/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Weeds/Pages/Default.aspx)

Photos by Dan Sharratt, Ken French, ODA