

Please call 1-866-invader if you suspect you have found this species

Purple starthistle
Centaurea calcitrapa

Other common names: red starthistle

USDA symbol: CECA2
ODA rating: A and T



Introduction: Purple starthistle is native to the Mediterranean region, southern Europe and northern Africa. It is well adapted to a range of temperature and moisture regimes. Its potential impact on agriculture, wildlife and recreation would be significant.

Distribution in Oregon: In Oregon, purple starthistle was first detected in Clackamas County and this site has been monitored and treated since 1993. A 2010 survey failed to locate any surviving plants. In 2009, a new infestation was discovered in Wheeler County. The Wheeler County site is receiving annual monitoring and treatment leading to eradication.

Description: Purple starthistle is actually a heavily armored knapweed species and not classified as a true thistle. It can function as an annual or biennial depending on moisture conditions. Seedlings will sprout in the fall or early spring forming spiny rosettes in May and June. Blooming continues from midsummer through fall as the plant grows 1 to 6 feet tall. To conserve moisture the plant is covered in fine hairs, with narrow linear leaves retarding moisture loss. Flower heads are purple and arrayed with straw-colored spine-like bracts over 1 inch in length. Seeds are *not* plumed, the distinguishing factor between this plant and Iberian starthistle.

Impacts: Closely resembling Iberian starthistle, both invasive species have the ability to adapt to a variety of climactic conditions. They are extremely competitive along roadsides and in low-rainfall rangeland, as well as in higher rainfall pastures, where they displace valuable forage. The sharp spines deter grazing animals or wildlife movement and their access to forage. Infestations reduce the value of hay, contaminate seed crops and can reduce the quality of recreational experiences. Purple starthistle has the potential to become widely established, imposing significant impacts to agriculture and wildland resources.

Biocontrol: There are no biological control agents approved for purple starthistle. The species is targeted for eradication.

