

“B” Rated Weeds

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

Musk thistle
Cardus nutans

Other common names: Nodding thistle

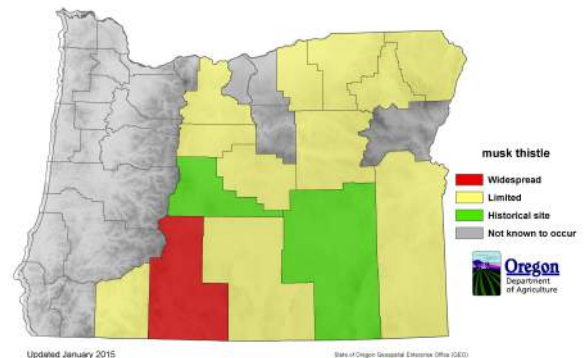
USDA symbol: CANU4
ODA rating: B



Introduction: Musk thistle is native to southern Europe and western Asia. Also known in England as nodding thistle, it was introduced to North America through ship’s ballast in the eastern United States in the mid 1800s. Today musk thistle occupies several million acres throughout the west in pasture, rangeland and in pine forests.

Distribution in Oregon: Klamath County is the most heavily infested musk thistle county in Oregon. Other counties contain smaller populations that are targeted for eradication or containment.

Description: It is a biennial thistle with the characteristic formation of a rosette in the first year followed by a three to five feet tall flower stalk in the second. It blooms in early June. Flower heads are large, purple, solitary and usually nodding. Musk thistle has dark green leaves with light green midrib and wavy, spiny lobed margins. Leaves have a smooth waxy surface and appear winged at the attachment to the stem.



Impacts: Musk thistle is unpalatable to wildlife and livestock hence selective grazing leads to severe degradation of native meadows and grasslands as grazers focus their foraging on native plants, giving musk thistle a competitive edge. It is also thought to produce chemicals that hinder the growth of other plants. The spines can be harmful to animals and can hinder their movement through heavily infested areas. Found in pasture, range and timberlands, it spreads by seeds, taking advantage of human disturbance. It is especially prolific in moist condition. Commonly infests ditch banks, roadsides, and cereal fields.

Biological controls: Six biocontrol agents have been approved for release. Three of these, a crown weevil, a seed head weevil and a flower fly, have been established in Oregon. *Cheilosia corydon*, *Rhinocyllus conicus*, *Trichosiocalus horridus*, *Urophora solstitialis*

