

# Blessed Milk Thistle

## Invasive Species Alert Sheet

### Capital Region Invasive Species Program

The spread of non-native invasive plants has serious ecological, economic and health impacts.

Local governments and partners are asking for help from all residents to address **blessed milk thistle** (*Silybum marianum*) outbreaks on private property and public lands. Local professionals can assist with the special treatment required for this species.



Flowering milk thistle

### Why is blessed milk thistle a problem?

- Highly invasive species that forms dense stands
- Can cause lethal nitrate poisoning in cattle and sheep and injury from spines
- Forms dense stands that exclude forage species and livestock



Blessed milk thistle seed

### What does it look like?

- Tap-rooted annual or biennial up to 2.5 metres tall
- **White marbling patterns** on shiny green, deeply lobed leaves
- One large purple flower per stem (2–2.5 cm).
- Broad, spiny bracts surrounding the flower head
- *Look for marbled leaves and spiny flower heads*
- Could be confused with other thistles such as bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)



### Habitat and biology

- Found predominantly in full to partial sun on disturbed sites such as roadsides, ditches, fencerows and fields.
- This plant is also an escapee from ornamental or medicinal gardens
- Annual or biennial plant in the sunflower (*Asteraceae*) family
- Flowers from April to October
- Over **6,000 seeds** per plant produced annually and can remain viable in the soil for at least **nine years**
- This species can overwinter as a rosette
- Seeds can be spread by water, mud, wind, agricultural produce, animals, machinery and vehicles



## Proper disposal

- Please place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled 'invasive species' and take to Hartland Landfill.
- **Do not compost.** Flowers can still form viable seed after removal.

## What should you do if you spot a blessed milk thistle plant?

Please report any sightings of this invasive species to the contacts listed at the bottom of this page.

- **Spread the word, not the weed:** don't purchase, grow or trade blessed milk thistle
- **Inform:** please report outbreaks to the contacts listed below for support and monitoring
- **Remove:** if you have an outbreak on your property, please follow the instructions below for careful removal and follow up
- **Prevent spread:** reduce new introductions or spread by using/purchasing clean soil and gravel free of seeds. Please report outbreaks from purchased soil.

Please **do not mow** as this may increase the problem.

*For small infestations (less than 25–30 plants):*

- **Manually remove** before they flower in April/May; dig or pull to avoid soil disturbance
- **Cut:** if unable to remove entire root, cut the plant/root about 2.5 cm below ground
- **Protect:** when flower heads present, wear protective clothing
- **Bag flowers/seeds:** if in flower or seed, carefully remove the flower/seed heads and bag them before digging out the plants; ensure all seeds are bagged.
- **Wash before leaving:** to avoid further seed spread wash footwear, vehicles and equipment before leaving the site
- **Monitor:** return in spring and fall for a few years to monitor growth and remove new plants
- **Replant:** especially in disturbed areas, replant with non-invasive or native plants

*Report large infestations (more than 25 plants) to the contacts listed below, at the bottom-left.*

### CONTACT INFORMATION

P: 250.360.3302  
E: [invasive@crd.bc.ca](mailto:invasive@crd.bc.ca)  
[www.reportaweedbc.ca](http://www.reportaweedbc.ca)  
[www.crd.bc.ca/invasive](http://www.crd.bc.ca/invasive)

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