

War on Weeds — Weeds are Everybody's Problem

THE ISSUE: Purple Starthistle

Purple starthistle (*Centaurea calcitrapa* L.) is a biennial or short-lived perennial that is native to the Mediterranean region. It invades pastures, rangelands, forests, disturbed areas, fields and bottom land. It can form dense monocultures that out compete native species. It has sharp spines that make it unpalatable to livestock, and it is toxic to horses if consumed.



Photo courtesy of Barry Rice, sarracenia.com, Bugwood.org

Purple starthistle grows from rosettes that have spines in the center and after bolting it can grow 2-3 feet tall. When young it is covered in fine hairs that fade with maturity. Lower leaves (4-8 inches long) are deeply lobed while upper leaves are not. Each plant has many pink-purple flower heads. Each flower head contains 25-40 individual flowers. Flowers have spined bracts (1 inch or longer) just under the flower. It reproduces solely by seed. Seeds are about 1/8 inch long and are not plumed, which distinguishes it from its relative Iberian starthistle.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Options:

- Prevention — Learn to identify this plant. Never transport unknown plant material. Always plant clean seed. Report any sightings.
- Mechanical — Hand digging can be effective on small infestations. Be sure to remove plant at least 2 inches below the soil surface before flowering occurs. Mowing is not an effective option; rosettes grow low to the ground allowing them to avoid damage.
- Cultural — Establish a healthy stand of beneficial plants that will compete for essential resources.
- Chemical — Apply herbicides in the spring while plants are in the seedling or rosette stage. Refer to Pacific Northwest Weed Management Handbook (<https://pnwhandbooks.org>) for herbicide recommendations (search “starthistle”).

Always read and follow herbicide label directions.

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