



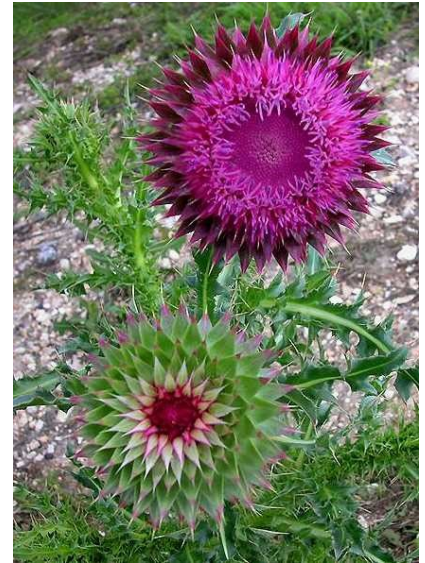
Weed of the Month: Musk Thistle

Welcome to our "Weed of the Month" feature, designed to raise awareness about the impact of noxious invasive weeds on our environment. This month, we're focusing on Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), an aggressive plant species that poses a significant threat to native ecosystems and agricultural lands.



Identification:

Musk Thistle, also known as nodding thistle, is a biennial herb with distinctive spiny stems and leaves alongside a cream-colored mid-rib and frosted appearance around leaf margins. It produces large bright purple flowers that range from 1-3 inches wide with green- and purple-colored sepals. As the name nodding thistle suggests, the large disk-shaped flower head droops to a 90-degree angle when it reaches its full maturity. An adult Musk Thistle is also able to reach a maximum of 6 ft tall.



Invasive Behavior:

Originating from Europe and Asia, Musk Thistle has become very invasive to many parts of North America. It thrives in a variety of habitats, including grasslands, roadsides, pastures, and waste areas. It is only reproduced from seed but thrives in degraded areas making pasture or rangeland that is in good condition prime growing ground for the weed and spreads rapidly.

Top Left- Close up image of a matured Musk Thistle bud with sepals.

Top Right- Musk Thistle flower heads in both flower and in bud.



Impact:

The presence of Musk Thistle can have serious ecological and economic consequences. It's poisonous to both equine and livestock. The selective grazing of livestock leads to the degradation of meadows and grasslands allowing Musk Thistle to take over. This lowers forage quality, posing challenges for farmers and ranchers.

Bottom Left- Musk Thistle seed during the flowering stage.

Bottom Right- Close up image of Musk Thistle seedlings.





Control and Management:

Effectively managing Musk Thistle is a time sensitive process. Early detection and rapid response are crucial. Mechanical methods are most effective prior to seed development and can be done by collecting flowers and seedheads in bags and disposing them to landfills. Herbicides may be necessary for established populations and should be applied during the rosette stage or prior to flowering. This practice should be used judiciously to minimize impact on non-target species.

Top Left- Rossett form of young Musk Thistle.
Bottom Right- Close up image of Musk Thistle leaf.

Prevention:

Preventing the spread of Musk Thistle is key to its control. Routinely inspect and maintain your property for any signs of this invader. Be vigilant for any signs of this weed in your area and report sightings to the Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office at **(530) 822-7500**.

By staying informed and taking proactive measures, we can work together to curb the spread of Musk thistle and protect our native ecosystems. Join us next month for a new "Weed of the Month" feature, where we'll highlight another noxious invasive plant and share tips on how to address it.

For more information about Musk Thistle, feel free to visit the California Invasive Plant Council website at: [Carduus nutans Profile – California Invasive Plant Council \(cal-ipc.org\)](https://www.cal-ipc.org)

For more information about our other county programs, visit our website at: <https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/agricultural-department>



Thank you for your dedication to preserving our environment and agricultural land!

- Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office

