

Plumeless Thistle

Carduus acanthoides

Description: Plumeless thistle is a biennial that produces a 24-inch rosette its first year and a 2-6 foot multi-branched, flowering, thorny stem in its second year. Leaves are dark green with a light green midrib and hairy on the underside. Pink to purple flowers are singular or in clusters and bloom mid-July to August. Seeds mature quickly and are dispersed by the wind. Because thistle spreads by seed, most effective management prevents seeds from forming.

Ecological Threat: Plumeless thistle is highly invasive to disturbed habitats such as pastures, roadsides, and ditches. In both pastures and native areas it will displace native plants and create monoculture.

Control Methods: Mechanical- Plants can be pulled using protective gloves or dug up with a shovel. Mowing can be used on larger sites to continuously prevent flowering and seed production throughout the season. Because large infestations are difficult to control, livestock managers should avoid overgrazing pastures and treat individual plants.

Chemical- Various herbicides are effective against plumeless thistle. Spot treating can weaken thistles, and rosettes can be targeted in the fall when native plants are less susceptible.

