

# Nodding thistle

Aka Musk thistle

*Carduus nutans*

**Provincial Designation:** Restricted

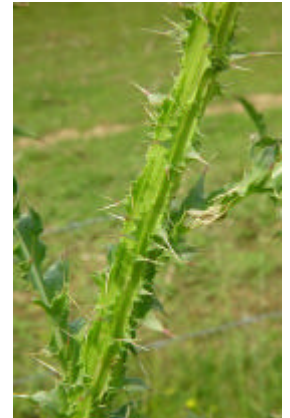
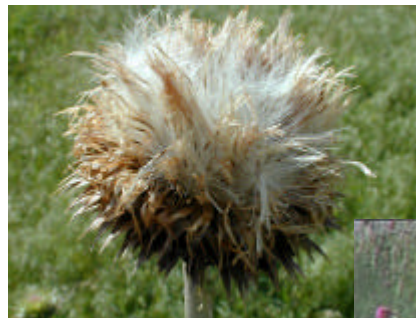
**Description:**

A biennial or winter annual (germinates in the fall and flowers the following growing season) that reproduces by seed only. It develops a long, fleshy taproot that becomes corky & hollow near the crown. Rosettes can be large.

**Stems** can be as short as 20 cm or grow to 200cm. One or more stems can grow from one root crown. Lower stems have thorny ridges.

**Leaves** are alternate, deep green and deeply lobed with spiny edges. Leaf margins are often white. Leaves tend to clasp the stem.

**Flowers** are solitary at the ends of stems and deep reddish-purple in color. Each flower head has several rows of spiny bracts. A robust plant can produce 100 or more flowers over a single season, producing up to 20,00 seeds. The plant dies after seed set.



**Control**

Several sub-species of Nodding thistle occur in North America (e.g. Plumeless thistle), but there are no native thistles in the genus *Carduus*. It prefers disturbed areas but is still able to compete with healthy plant communities. Because it is unpalatable, unmanaged grazing will result in larger infestations. Nodding thistle can form tall, impenetrable thickets.

Preventing seed production is the key to controlling this invasive plant. Mowing just before seed set is effective, but the debris should be collected and burned. Severing the taproot just below ground will kill plants.

Several herbicides are registered for use on Nodding thistle, and can be very effective when applied before plants bolt. Two biological control agents have also proven very effective, but one has also moved onto non-target thistles. Learn how to recognize this invasive plant in the early stages and the likelihood of eradicating from your property is very good.