



Yellow starthistle

Centaurean solstitialis L.

Family: Asteracea (Sunflower)

Class B Noxious Weed
Control and Containment

Background Information

Yellow starthistle, a member of the Sunflower family, is a Class-B Noxious Weed in Franklin County. Yellow starthistle originated in the Mediterranean area and Asia. It is a taproot annual that spreads exclusively by seed.

As a winter annual, yellow starthistle germinates in the fall, over-winters as a seedling, flowers in the spring and summer, then produces seeds and dies. One large plant can produce as many as 75,000 seeds. Seedlings resemble dandelion with deeply lobed leaves. Mature plants are gray-green with winged stems, growing about 2 to 3 feet tall. Solitary flowers at the ends of stems are bright yellow with sharp spines beneath the flowers.

If untreated, this highly competitive invader crowds out native vegetation and desirable forage. It produces a toxin that can cause Chewing Disease in horses. Horses usually avoid eating yellow starthistle because of its bitter taste, but can contract the fatal disease if allowed to graze heavily infested pastures without alternative forage or if they are fed contaminated hay for a long period of time.

Impacts

- ◆ Invades roadsides, field edges and overgrazed rangelands, crowding out desirable forage vegetation.
- ◆ Can cause Chewing Disease in horses by damaging the part of the brain that controls motor functions, such as mouth and lip movements. Fatal if left untreated, infected horses eventually die of starvation or dehydration. The sharp spines may also injure the eyes of cattle or other animals that graze around the plants.



Flower bracts are armed with sharp spines.



Yellow starthistle can be fatal to horses.

Key Identifying Traits

- ◆ Bright yellow flowers with sharp spines at the bases of flower bracts.
- ◆ 2 to 3 feet tall, has grayish-green stems and small wings on stems.
- ◆ Old plants or last year's skeletons are easily identifiable by the presence of cottony white tufts where flowers were.
- ◆ Flowerheads are borne singly on ends of branches.
- ◆ Rosettes resemble dandelion with deeply lobed leaves.



Rosettes resemble dandelions.

Biology and Ecology

- ◆ Winter annual—reproduces only by seed.
- ◆ Invades rangelands, roadsides and other disturbed areas.
- ◆ Thrives in sunny sites—does not tolerate shade.
- ◆ Can produce up to 75,000 seeds per large plant.
- ◆ Often grows in areas where cheatgrass is present.



A yellow starthistle infestation in bloom.

Control Measures

Prevention

- ◆ Early detection is vital to prevent invasion.
- ◆ Beware of contaminated fill dirt, hay and seed from outside your area.
- ◆ Do not overgraze rangelands.
- ◆ **Biological**
- ◆ Sheep, goats and cattle can graze on yellow starthistle in early spring before spines develop. Goats can also graze plants in the spiny or flowering stages.
- ◆ **Cultural**
- ◆ Maintain a good competitive vegetation stand to help prevent infestation.
- ◆ **Mechanical**
- ◆ Mowing is not an effective control.
- ◆ Hand pulling can work on small infestations of fewer than a dozen plants.
- ◆ **Chemical**
- ◆ Aminopyralid herbicides such as Milestone, Chaparral or Opensight are effective for spring and fall applications. 2,4-D can be added to increase effectiveness in summer.

FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS, THE LABEL IS THE LAW.

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