

Musk thistle



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(*Carduus nutans* L.)

Musk thistle is the most common and easiest to identify biennial invasive thistle in North Dakota. Musk thistle often grows in excess of 6 feet tall, has very large flowers that tend to droop, and has very characteristic brown bracts that resemble a pine cone. The flowers are deep rose singular on each stem and 1.5 to 3 inches in diameter. The plant bolts from dark green large (more than 2 feet) rosettes in midsummer and flowers from July to late September. Musk thistle stems are usually multi-branched with spiny wings. The leaves are oblong to lanceolate and lobed with slender spines on the margins. Musk thistle has little pubescence underneath the leaves which helps to differentiate this plant from plumeless thistle. Musk thistle can produce in excess of 10,000 seeds per plant.

Musk thistle most often is found in overgrazed or otherwise disturbed pastures, roadsides and waste areas. Musk thistle biocontrol agents generally have been ineffective.

