**Onopordum acanthium**
(Scotch thistle)

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**COMMON NAME**

Scotch thistle

**FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME**

*Onopordum acanthium* L.

**FAMILY NAME COMMON**

Aster family

**FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME**

Asteraceae

**IMAGES**

- Habit
- Basal Rosettes
- Habitat
- Flower Close-up
- Spines on Leaves
NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

Synonyms: None

DESCRIPTION

Botanical Glossary

*Onopordum acanthium* is an herbaceous biennial that grows up to 2 m (6.5 ft.) in height or rarely taller. The plant is coarse, many-spined and is highly branched. The stems of *Onopordum acanthium* are winged. The whole plant is densely tomentose, giving it a bluish-white appearance. The leaves are obovate and prickly, being toothed or slightly lobed along the margins. The apex of the leaf is acute. The leaves are mostly sessile, with some of the lower leaves having petioles. The blades of the lower leaves can measure up to 30 cm (1 ft.) long. Since this plant is a biennial, only the basal rosette of leaves is present in the first year of its growth.

The flower heads are purple and measure 2.5-5 cm (1-2 in.) in diameter. All of the bracts of the involucre are tipped with flat, pale, orange-colored spines. *Onopordum acanthium* flowers from July to October. The seeds of this plant are 4-5 mm (0.2 in.) long. They are gray in color, and attached to a brown-colored pappus that can be two times as long as the seed.


SIMILAR SPECIES

Other native and invasive thistles

REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

The seeds of *Onopordum acanthium* are dispersed by wind and water, by means of its pappus.

DISTRIBUTION

*Onopordum acanthium* is native to west, central and southern Europe as well as some parts of Russia. In the United States the plant is found in most states, from Vermont to Virginia, Alabama and Florida and west to California, Oregon, and Washington. In New England this plant has been reported from Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Though the actual date of introduction of *Onopordum acanthium* is
unknown, it was most likely introduced in the 19th century as a garden plant. Since it is easily dispersed via wind and water, it likely escaped from gardens onto the landscape.

**HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND**

- Abandoned Field
- Agricultural Field
- Edge
- Open Disturbed Area
- Pasture
- Roadside
- Vacant Lot
- Yard or Garden

*Onopordum acanthium* can still be found in gardens in New England. However, it is more common in agricultural settings, where it is the most problematic.

**THREATS**

*Onopordum acanthium* is a major agricultural weed in the western United States. If the soil is moist enough, it has the ability to resprout when its roots are cut up during cultivation. This plant spreads easily because each plant can produce over 20,000 lightweight seeds that are dispersed by wind as well as water. The seeds can also be dispersed by becoming attached to livestock. *Onopordum acanthium* should be monitored in New England in order to avoid it becoming as problematic as it is in many western states.

**MANAGEMENT LINKS**

- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board

**DOCUMENTATION NEEDS**

- **Documentation required**: A specific photograph or mounted snippet of the flowers, leaves, and/or rosettes.
- **Best time for documentation**: Spring, summer, fall.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- Integrated Taxonomic Information System
- Taxonomic information
- PLANTS Database
- General information and map
- Global Invasive Species Database
- Images, description, and general information
REFERENCES


(http://plants.usda.gov). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.


DATA RETRIEVAL

Select a task by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- Formatted display as table
- Export as comma-delimited text file

Submit Selection

MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- The whole New England area
- One or more states
- One or more counties
- One or more towns (county sub-divisions)

Submit Selection