

Agriculture Protection Board
Advisory Leaflet No. 24
September 1977
Agdex No. 647
103701/7/77—7,500—L/2597

ARTICHOKE THISTLE



Artichoke thistle is a potentially dangerous weed of pasture in higher rainfall areas of Western Australia. When established, it dominates pasture by shading and by competing for moisture and nutrients. Artichoke thistle is not poisonous. The prickly nature of the plant deters sheep and cattle from grazing a heavy infestation, but, when hungry, they will eat Artichoke thistle foliage and survive on it. A closely related species, Globe artichoke, is grown commercially as a vegetable in Western

Australia, but has shown no indication of spreading and becoming established as a weed. Artichoke thistle is a native of the Mediterranean regions. Artichoke thistle was introduced to Australia late last century, either by accident with fodder or grain, or as an ornamental because of its attractive flowers. These flowers, called Cardoons, are prized by florists for dry flower arrangements. Artichoke thistle is a Declared Plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia.
Description:
Artichoke thistle is a

perennial plant. It forms a broad rosette of very large leaves and a well developed tap root in the first season. The leaves are greyish-green on the upper surface while the under surface appears almost white because of the dense mat of white hairs. The leaves are deeply divided, each lobe ending in a strong yellow spine. The plant occasionally flowers in the first year, but usually not until the second summer. The first set of rosette leaves may die off over the summer and new leaves are then formed in the second autumn. Branched

ABOVE: Artichoke thistle flower heads.

central flowering stems up to 1.9 metres high emerge in the spring. Flowering commences in early December and continues into February, after which the aerial growth of the plant dies off. New rosette leaves are produced from the crown after autumn rains and the cycle recommences. One large blue to purple flower from 8 mm to 13 mm in diameter is produced at the end of each branch. The flowers
(continued overleaf)

ARTICHOKE THISTLE

(continued)

are surrounded by a series of rigid spines. Up to fifty flowers can be produced on each plant. Artichoke thistle reproduces by seed and, to a limited extent, from a perennial tap root. The seeds are brown or black, about 5 mm long with a

smooth covering. The seeds are equipped with a "parachute" of feathery bristles 4 cm long. A new plant can form from the tap root after cultivation. Seeds are set in summer. The seeds are too big for effective wind dispersal, most falling within 20

metres of the flowering plant and the majority within a metre. Seed may also be spread by flooding, sheep, cattle, birds and mice. Prompt action is essential to eradicate isolated patches of Artichoke thistle to prevent the weed getting

established in Western Australia.

Suspect plants should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board: Telephone Perth 67 0111 or any country officer of the Agriculture Protection Board or Department of Agriculture.