

STEMLESS THISTLE



Stemless Thistle

Photograph from "Noxious Weeds of Victoria"

Stemless thistle is a troublesome weed of pastures in south eastern Australia which could cause severe economic loss if allowed to establish in Western Australia.

Stemless thistle can severely reduce the carrying capacity of pasture because its big, flat growing, unpalatable leaves cover a large proportion of the ground.

Stock, when hungry, will eat stemless thistle, but it may cause impaction of the animals' stomachs and liver damage.

Stemless thistle is a native of the Mediterranean region. Isolated infestations have been found in Western Australia.

Stemless thistle is a declared plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia.

Description:

Stemless thistle is an annual plant. Its most characteristic

feature is that, unlike other thistles, it does not form a flowering stem. Seeds germinate in the autumn and form small rosettes of leaves. These grow slowly until the spring, when the rosettes expand rapidly, often to a diameter of 60 cm or more.

The leaves are whitish green, with a very woolly surface and deeply divided spiny edges.

The plants flower in October-November. Clusters of large white to purple flowers are formed close to the ground in the centre of the rosette. Each flower is surrounded by a circle of sharp spines.

Stemless thistle reproduces only from seeds. The seeds are either brown or grey, about 4 mm long, four-sided, with a pitted and ridged seed coat.

Stemless thistle seeds are well

adapted to be dispersed by wind, and this is the main way in which the plant is spread. The seeds are equipped with a parachute of hairs up to 25 mm long. Stemless thistle can also be spread in agricultural produce, on vehicles and by animals. The seed can remain dormant in the soil for several years. More than one germination can occur during the year, which combined with the seed dormancy, makes it a difficult weed to eradicate.

Prompt action is essential to kill isolated patches of stemless thistle to prevent the weed getting established in Western Australia.

Suspect plants should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board, Telephone Perth 367 0111 or any country officer of the Agriculture Protection Board or Department of Agriculture.