



# APB INFONOTE

## STEMLESS THISTLE



1. Infestation
2. Flowers
3. Rosette
4. Seeds
5. Mature plant

*(Continued overleaf)*



# STEMLESS THISTLE

Stemless thistle (*Onopordum acaulon*) originated in the western Mediterranean region. Only in Australia is it a weed.

It is found in pastures, roadsides, disturbed areas, irrigated vegetable crops and cultivated land in south-eastern Australia. Infestations are found in both high rainfall and semi-arid areas.

In Western Australia infestations have mainly been found in coastal districts.

Stemless thistle reduces the carrying capacity of pastures. The plant is unpalatable except when wilted. It spreads over large areas, shading out more useful plants with its big flat leaves. Hungry stock forced

to eat stemless thistle suffer from stomach impaction. Sometimes liver and kidney damage also occurs.

## Life cycle

Stemless thistle germinates from seed mainly in the autumn. It persists through winter as a small rosette. This grows rapidly in spring. It flowers from October to November and then dies off. Seedlings arising from winter and spring germinations seldom produce viable seed; they die off in early summer.

## Ecology

Stemless thistle is an annual plant reproducing only from seed. The seeds are well adapted for wind dispersal with a large feathery pappus. They may also be spread by vehicles, stock and produce. Seeds may remain dormant

for several years. Several germinations are common during autumn-spring.

## Description

Stemless thistle has a rosette of whitish-green leaves covered in woolly hairs. The rosette may spread to cover an area up to 60 cm or more in diameter. The leaves all arise from the base of the plant. They are deeply divided with waxy spiny lobes.

Flowers are borne in globular flower heads 4 to 6 cm in diameter. They have white or purple petals and are surrounded by sharp spines. A cluster of several flower heads are formed at the centre of the rosette, close to the ground. They have no stalks.

The seeds are grey-brown in colour and about 4mm long. They are four-sided with a ridged seed coat and 25mm long pappus (parachute) for wind dispersal.

Stemless thistle has the potential to be a widespread and damaging weed in Western Australia. As with all weeds, prevention is better than cure. Therefore it is essential to identify and eradicate small infestations as soon as they are found.

**For assistance in stemless thistle recognition and advice on control techniques contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth. Telephone (09) 368 3333 or any local office of the APB or the Department of Agriculture.**