

# APB INFONOTE

## GLAUCOUS STAR THISTLE

OS: 632.5(941) 607149



1. Rosette  
(Photo: Robyn Knox)
2. Flower  
(Photo: JJ Dellow, NSW Agriculture)
3. Mature plant  
(Photo: Sue Wilkins)

# GLAUCOUS STAR THISTLE

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## **What you should know about glaucous star thistle**

Glaucous star thistle (*Carthamus leucocaulos*) is a weed that looks very similar to saffron thistle, except that it has purple flowers. Glaucous star thistle is a native of Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. It is a potentially serious weed in the Great Southern but odd

plants have also been found close to the Eyre Highway east of Norseman. Glaucous star thistle is a declared plant in WA. It is illegal to grow it and any plants found must be destroyed.

## **Why glaucous star thistle matters to you**

Glaucous star thistle appears to have similar properties to saffron thistle which competes with crops and useful pasture plants for light, nutrients and moisture. The thistles have stiff spiny leaves which discourage grazing. The

spines injure the mouths and eyes of livestock which attempt to graze it, or to feed on hay and chaff containing it. Glaucous star thistle may cause vegetable fault in wool if plant parts become entangled in the fleece.

## **What you should look for**

- Glaucous star thistle forms a flat rosette plant up to 15 cm in diameter.
- The leaves are dark green with a broad final lobe and narrower irregular lobes along the sides. Each lobe ends in a short spine.
- Stems up to 1.5 metres tall grow as the rosette leaves die off. The stem is erect, with whitish-green ribs and is usually branched about half way up. As it matures it becomes more stiff and spiny.
- Purple flowers develop at the end of each branch in summer. They are typical thistle flowers, surrounded by a set of lance-shaped spikes.
- The seeds are large, about 3 to 4 mm long and grey-brown with prominent ribs and a smooth seed coat. The are attached to a small pappus (parachute) but are too large for wind dispersal.
- Glaucous star thistle may be distinguished from saffron thistle by its somewhat smaller seeds and purple flowers. The seedling and rosette stages of the two weeds cannot be distinguished by eye.
- The stiff dead plant remains standing after the seeds have been shed.

## **Why creeping knapweed might succeed in WA**

Glaucous star thistle is an annual plant reproducing from seed. The seed probably can survive dormant in the soil for a number of years. Most seeds have a parachute-like attachment of stiff bristles which aids spread, attached to the coats of animals or to textiles.

It may also be spread as a contaminant of hay or chaff. Glaucous star thistle germinates in winter, the flowering stem starts to form in spring and flowering takes place in November or December.

## **What you can do about it**

At present only a handful of properties in the Great Southern are known to be infested. But we need to prevent the weed spreading further.

Eradicate any new infestation found and gradually reduce and eliminate existing infestations.

## **Where to find out more**

For further information on glaucous star thistle contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth 6151. Telephone (09) 368 3472 or the nearest country office of the APB or the Department of Agriculture.

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