

Musk thistle

ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family

Carduus nutans L.



Common Name: Musk thistle (nodding thistle, nodding plumeless thistle)

Growth Form: Forb

Life Span: Biennial (occasionally annual)

Origin: Eurasia

Flowering Dates: May-August

Reproduction: Seeds

Height: 0.5-3 m (1.6-9.8 ft)

Inflorescence: Heads, globose (3-7 cm in diameter), solitary, terminal, nodding; heads 1-2 on upper branches, 2-9 heads on lower branches; outer involucral bracts 1.5-4.5 cm long and 5-7 mm wide, outer and middle involucral bracts with a constriction

Flower: Rose-purple to white disk florets (2-4.5 cm tall), developing from the outer edge to the center

Fruit: Achene 3-4 mm long, yellowish-brown, one edge straight and the other curved; pappus of white bristles (2 cm long); seeds 1

Seed: Small

Leaves: Alternate; blades simple; rosette blades lanceolate to elliptic (5-25 cm long, 1.5-9 cm wide), margins deeply serrate to pinnately lobed (lobes often white), surfaces without hair, veins extending past margins as spines; upper blades (1-15 cm long) like rosette blades except clasping the stem

Stems: Erect, highly branched, with spiny wings (5-20 mm wide)

Underground: Taproot, fleshy, stout

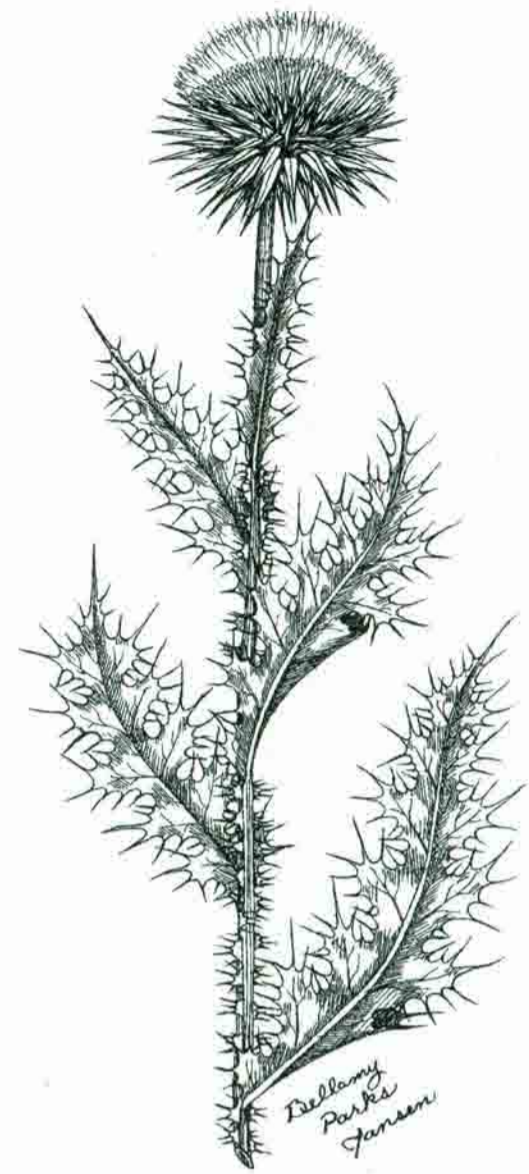
Where Found: Widespread throughout the Great Plains and is especially abundant in the east central part of the region. It grows in pastures, rangeland, open woodlands, and fertile lowlands. (NE, SD, ND, KS, OK, TX, MN, IA, MO, WY, CO, SK, & MB)

Uses and Values: Musk thistle seeds are eaten by songbirds.

Poisoning: None

Historical: In Eurasia, dried flowers have been used to curdle milk. The pith of second-year plants and roots of first-year plants are occasionally boiled and eaten.

Other: Musk thistle is classified as a noxious weed throughout the region. Seeds may mature in heads after control. Therefore, control by hand or with herbicides must be done before heading, or heads must be collected by hand and burned. Seeds germinate in the fall or spring forming a rosette of leaves.



Seeds germinate in the fall or spring forming rosettes of leaves.

Musk thistle leaves (left) are not as deeply serrate and lack hairs, while plumeless thistle leaves (right) are deeply serrate and have hair on the undersides.

