

# BLESSED MILK THISTLE

*Silybum marianum*

INVASIVE PLANT ALERT



One of the biggest threats to natural ecosystems in Saanich is the spread of invasive non-native plants. The District of Saanich appreciates the cooperation of all residents in removing Blessed Milk Thistle from private property.

**For assistance see contacts on reverse.**

## Why is Blessed Milk Thistle a problem?

### Warning: spiny invasive

- Highly invasive non-native plant species that forms dense stands
- Caution: threat to livestock. Can cause lethal nitrate poisoning in cattle and sheep and injury from spines
- Can severely reduce forage and exclude livestock in agricultural lands

*Spiny invasive thistle  
toxic to livestock*

## What does it look like?

- Tap-rooted annual or biennial up to 2.5 metres tall
- White marbling patterns on shiny green, deeply lobed leaves
- One large purple flower per stem (2 to 6 cm)
- Broad, spiny bracts surrounding the flower head
- Distinguish from other thistles by marbled leaves and spiny flower-head

## Could be confused with:

- Other thistles such as Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)

## Habitat and biology:

- Annual or biennial plant in the sunflower (Asteraceae) family
- Found predominantly in full sun or partial shade on roadsides, ditches, fencerows and fields. Disturbed sites and sites with high nitrogen levels are more susceptible to invasion. Escapee from ornamental or medicinal gardens
- Flowers from April to October
- Over 6,000 seeds per plant produced annually
- Seeds remain viable in the soil for at least 9 years
- This species can overwinter as a rosette (see below)
- Reproduction by seed, can be spread by water, mud, wind, agricultural produce, animals, machinery and vehicles

## Distribution

- Native to the Mediterranean region; recently reported in a few sites in British Columbia, including Greater Victoria and the Sunshine Coast.



## What should I do?

- **Spread the word, not the plant:** don't plant Blessed Milk Thistle
- **Report:** please contact Saanich (as below) to report locations and sale of infested soil
- **Remove:** If you have properly identified Blessed Milk Thistle on your property, use the best control methods (below) to eliminate it
- **Clean:** stop seed spread by brushing off clothing/shoes, tires and equipment before leaving the infested area
- **Monitor:** check the site at least a few times a year to continue removal
- **Replant:** after effectively eliminating this plant, replant non-invasive plants (such as appropriate native species)
- **Volunteer:** find out more about volunteering with Saanich to control priority invasive species.  
Pulling Together Program: [saanich.ca/volunteers](http://saanich.ca/volunteers)

**Caution: wear puncture-resistant, protective clothing when in contact with this plant.**

## Small Populations

- **Manually remove** small infestations as soon as possible, especially before the plants flower. If in flower/seed, carefully remove flower/seed heads and bag before digging out the plants. Use care to remove all seeds.
- Dig or pull rosettes and plants, avoiding soil disturbance as much as possible.
- Consider using a shovel/trowel to ease out the roots or cut the root about 2.5 cm below ground to avoid re-sprouting
- Do not mow as it may increase the problem
- Carefully dispose of all plant parts (as below)



King County Noxious Weed Program

## Large Populations

- Contact Environmental Services to assist you in making a plan to treat large populations. **Note: pesticide use requires a permit in Saanich**

## Proper Disposal

- The best option is to place all plant parts in tarps (or bags for small plants), take to Hartland Landfill and identify as invasive plants (landfill disposal, not garden waste).
- Dispose of in the Saanich Garden Waste drop off ONLY if flowers/seeds are not present.
- **DO NOT COMPOST!**

## Who do you call?

Contact Saanich for assistance and more information about Blessed Milk Thistle, other invasive plants and volunteer opportunities.

### On Public Lands:

Saanich Parks:  
250-475-5522 or [parks@saanich.ca](mailto:parks@saanich.ca)

### On Private Land:

Saanich Environmental Services:  
250-475-5471 or [planning@saanich.ca](mailto:planning@saanich.ca)

## Other resources

Report-a-Weed BC  
[reportaweedbc.ca](http://reportaweedbc.ca)

Capital Region Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP)  
[crispinvasives.ca](http://crispinvasives.ca)

King County Noxious Weed Program  
[kingcounty.gov](http://kingcounty.gov)

Saanich Native Plant List  
[saanich.ca/environment](http://saanich.ca/environment)  
(tools and resources)