

The Saanich logo consists of the word "Saanich" in a white, sans-serif font, positioned above a white semi-circle that resembles a rising sun or a stylized horizon line. The entire logo is set against a purple background.

# Blessed Milk Thistle

*Silybum marianum*

**Invasive  
Plant  
Alert**



Jan Samanek, State Phytosanitary Administration,  
Bugwood.org

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 please contact:*

**On Private Land:**

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

**On Public Lands:**

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



Melissa Noel

## **Why is Blessed Milk Thistle a problem?**

- 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

## **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 2.5 cm)
- Broad, spiny bracts surrounding the flower head
- Distinguish from other thistles by marbled leaves and spiny flower-head.
- **Look for:** White marbling on shiny dark leaves and spiny flower-heads.

## **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 opposite photo).
- Reproduction by seed, can be spread by water, mud, wind, agricultural produce, animals, machinery and vehicles.



Photo by Richard Old  
[www.xidservices.com](http://www.xidservices.com)



Forest & Kim Starr



King County Noxious Weed  
Control Program

# Invasive Plant Alert



## Online resources

- Invasive Plant Council of BC
- Coastal Invasive Plant Committee
- King County Noxious Weed Program
- Invasive Alien Plant Program

## Distribution

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

## What should you do?

Please report any sightings of this species to the contacts below.

- Manually remove** for small infestations as soon as possible, especially before the plants flower (April/May). Dig or pull rosettes and plants, avoiding soil disturbance as much as possible. If necessary, use a shovel to cut the plant about 2.5 centimetres below ground to avoid re-sprouting.
- Bag flowers/seeds.** If plants are in flower or seed, carefully remove flower/seed heads and bag before digging out plants. Wear protective clothing. Use care to remove all seeds.
- Wash before leaving** to avoid further spread by seeds, wash footwear, vehicles and equipment before leaving the site.
- Contact** Saanich Environmental Services for larger infestations.
- Return** to the site in spring and fall for several years to repeat removal and monitor.
- Please **do not mow** (may increase problem) **or use pesticides** without a permit.
- Replant the area** (especially disturbed areas) with non-invasive plants such as appropriate native species.
- Spread the word**, not the plant. Tell your neighbours about Blessed Milk Thistle and other invasive plants.
- Volunteer** to help remove priority invasives in Saanich at: [www.invasives.saanich.ca](http://www.invasives.saanich.ca)

## Proper disposal:

- The District of Saanich is in the process of developing options for invasive species disposal. Please call Environmental Services or check the website for updates [www.invasives.saanich.ca](http://www.invasives.saanich.ca).
- Currently, the best option is to place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled "invasive species" and take to Hartland Landfill.
- DO NOT COMPOST!** Flowers can still form viable seeds after removal.
- Note that Blessed Milk Thistle is easily spread by seeds, including on vehicles, machinery and animals. Please use care in disposal to avoid further spread.

## Who do you call?

Contact Saanich for assistance and more information about (species), other invasive plants and volunteer opportunities.

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Noxious Weeds Bylaw No. 8080:

The District of Saanich requires all landowners clear their property of any noxious weeds and other vegetation that could spread or become a nuisance