

Saffron thistle

Carthamus lanatus



History

Saffron thistle is a native of the Mediterranean region and western Asia, and has spread to many parts of the world. It was first recorded in South Australia in 1874, and its introduction may have been unintentional due to confusion with its close relative, safflower, which was imported as a source of dye.

Description

The plant is an erect, annual herb, growing to one metre or more high. The leaves are up to 20 cm long and deeply divided with stout spines. Stems are yellowish white or very pale green, flowers being solitary, yellow and surrounded by spiny bracts. Seeds are four sided, 15 mm to 8 mm long, and ovoid in shape.

The problem

This plant is found in cultivated paddocks, poor pastures or neglected areas and when present in thick patches can restrict stock movement and cause injury to grazing animals, particularly in the eyes and mouth. Competition with pastures reduces carrying capacity, and crop yields may also be reduced. In wool growing areas, an increase in the vegetable fault content is likely.

This weed is more likely to occur on pastures which have been overgrazed, or in soils of low nutrient levels. As the seed of this plant is heavy it tends to fall at the base of the plant. This causes infestations to be more localised and spread is not rapid.

Distribution

Saffron thistle occurs in all states of Australia and in the Northern Territory. It occurs extensively in the wheat growing areas of New South Wales and Victoria. In Queensland it occurs on the Darling Downs and in coastal areas north to the tropics.

Control

Deep ploughing, to a depth of 10-15 cm will bury many seeds and reduce emergence. Seedlings emerging can be destroyed by shallow cultivation or spraying. Improved perennial or native pastures will prevent establishment, as saffron thistle is a poor competitor. If annual treatments are performed and seeding is reduced, germination will be reduced.

In pasture areas avoid heavy grazing as it will encourage saffron thistle growth, and apply superphosphate to promote pasture growth.

Slashing shortly before flowering can also effectively prevent seed production. However, if slashing is carried out too early, plants often regrow and produce new flower heads.

Declaration details

Saffron thistle is not declared under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*, however, plants that are not declared under state legislation may have control requirements imposed by local governments.

Further information

Further information is available from the vegetation management/weed control/environmental staff at your local government.



TABLE 1 – HERBICIDES REGISTERED FOR THE CONTROL OF SAFFRON THISTLE

Situation	Herbicide	Rate	Comments
Winter cereals	2,4-D Amine 500	0.28-1.7L/ha	Boom spray when young
Sorghum	Amicide 500	0.7-1.4L/ha	Boom spray when young
Fields/fallow	Glyphosate 450	0.8-1.2L/ha	Boom spray when young
Pastures-grass	MCPA 500 (Amine)	0.7-4L/ha	Boom spray when young

Fact sheets are available from DPI&F service centres and the DPI&F Information Centre phone (13 25 23). Check our web site <www.dpi.qld.gov.au> to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this Pest Fact should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the utilisation of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

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