

Invasive Species of Truckee Meadows

Musk Thistle

Carduus nutans



Identification

Musk thistle can be identified by its basal rosettes in the first season and bright purple flowers in the second season. The leaves have serrated, prickly edges with a light midvein. Its flower shoots are devoid of leaves and can grow between 2 and 6ft tall. The sepals are large and spiny.



Reproduction

As a biennial plant, meaning it completes its life cycle in two seasons, musk thistle reproduces only by seed. Seedlings develop in early spring, and the first year is dedicated to vegetative growth. In the following year flowers and thus seeds are produced. It can produce up to 20,000 seeds annually from upwards of 100 seed heads per plant. Musk thistle dies after seeds are produced.



Management

It is key to prevent seed production in successfully controlling musk thistle. This can be done through manual pulling,



mowing before the onset of flowers, or use of herbicides. A combined treatment is most successful in managing musk thistle. Musk thistle's tolerance to herbicides increases after it flowers. Be sure you are using an appropriate herbicide and **read the label** before use.

Plant These Native Alternatives:



Willowherb
(*Epilobium* spp.)



Penstemon spp.



Bigleaf lupine
(*Lupinus polyphyllus*)



Woollypod milkvetch
(*Astragalus purshii*)

Other alternatives:
Nettleleaf giant hyssop
(*Agastache urticifolia*)
Purple sage
(*Salvia dorrii*)

For more information and resources, check out this link:

