



Noxious Weed Fact Bulletin

A partnership between Island County Noxious Weed Board & Whidbey Island Conservation District

Purple Starthistle, *Centaurea calcitrapa*



Purple Starthistle is native to the Mediterranean region of Europe. While its common name implies that it is related to other thistles, it is in the genus *Centaurea*, the knapweeds. It's a regulated **Class A** weed in Island County, meaning that it is not widespread, and property owners are **required to eradicate it**.

Purple Starthistle generally grows as a biennial, germinating and growing into a rosette the first year, then bolting into a densely branched, extremely spiny 1 to 4 foot plant. Leaves are divided or deeply lobed, becoming less divided toward the top of the plant. Stems are hairless, and have fine grooves. Flowering occurs from July to October, when purple to pink blooms develop at the ends of the stems. The floral bracts, or phyllaries, are noteworthy, as they are tipped with 1 in. long, straw colored spines.

Though technically classified as a biennial, in some situations it may behave as an annual or as a short-lived perennial. Plants can germinate from fall through spring, so plant maturity can be staggered within a stand. This makes control particularly difficult as different growth stages respond differently to control techniques.

Purple Starthistle is best controlled by frequent hoeing or digging. Mowing is not an effective control method because plants in the rosette stage generally grow below the height of the mower blade and because the plant's robust taproot resprouts when top growth is cut. Mature plants that are mowed are likely to become bushier and produce more seed and flowers. Mowing can also cause seed to be disbursed more widely.

As always, if you have more questions you can contact the Island County Noxious Weed Coordinator at 678-7992, or at: janet.stein@wsu.edu. For more information on Purple Starthistle, visit the Washington Noxious Weed Control Board website here:

<http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/detail.asp?weed=111>

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