



Yellow starthistle invasion

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YELLOW STARThISTLE DESCRIPTION

Yellow starthistle grows to a height of one, sometimes two meters. The plant stem is erect and rigid, bears many branches and is covered with white cottony hair. Its foliage is grey to bluish-green, and its basal leaves are deeply lobed, while its upper stem leaves are almost linear or narrowly oblong. The leaf bases extend down the stems giving the stem a winged appearance. It generally flowers May through December, but in Oregon, it flowers only July through August. The flower heads are yellow, located singly at the ends of branches, and are armed with thorns up to ¼ inch long.

MALTESE STARThISTLE DESCRIPTION

Maltese starthistle is similar to yellow starthistle except yellow starthistle is a taller and more robust plant. Also, maltese starthistle's central spines of the flower head are 5-10 mm long, whereas they are longer (10-25 mm) on yellow starthistle.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Yellow flower heads and long, sharp spines
- Leaf bases extend down the stems giving it a winged appearance

WHEN TO FIND STARThISTLES

Yellow starthistle is most easily found when flower from July through August.

WHERE TO FIND STARThISTLES

It grows in dry areas, rangelands, pastures, edges of cropland, open woodlands, roadsides and disturbed areas.

WHAT TO DO

Small populations can be hand pulled. Effective control of yellow starthistle requires the suppression of seed production and an integrated approach using several control methods. See the Global Invasive Species Database (<http://issg.org/database/>) for more control information.

Yellow Starthistle and Maltese Starthistle

Yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) and maltese starthistle (*Centaurea melitensis*) are aggressive and adaptable weeds that pose a great threat to native plant communities and wildlife. Their primary impact is to deplete soil moisture in grasslands such that when starthistle infestations are high, native species can experience drought conditions even in years with normal rainfall.

Both species are capable of surviving in a wide range of habitats, and are now spread throughout California, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Yellow starthistle is considered one of the most serious weeds in the Northwest.

Reproduction is by seed, which germinate in fall. Young plants exist as a basal rosette through the winter until flowering stems develop in late spring and early summer. Seeds are dispersed by wind, human activities (such as vehicles, road maintenance, and contaminated crop seed or hay), birds (which feed on the seeds), livestock, water, and soil movement.

Overall, starthistles reduce land value of recreational areas and displace native plants, decreasing wildlife forage and, thus, native plant and animal diversity.

REFERENCES

DiTomaso, Dr. Joe. Element Stewardship Abstract for *Centaurea solstitialis*, Yellow Starthistle. The Nature Conservancy, 2001.

Global Invasive Species Database information on Maltese Starthistle <http://issg.org/database/species>



Winged appearance of stems
Photo © Tania Siemens/TNC



Maltese Starthistle
Photo © John Randall/TNC



Yellow Starthistle
Photo © Tania Siemens/TNC

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