

Tasmanian Weeds
SPEAR THISTLE

(Scotch or Black Thistle)

Genus / Species: *Cirsium vulgare* (Savi) Ten.
(*Cirsium lanceolatum* (L.) Scop.)

Family:
Asteraceae (Compositae)

Biennial

Spear Thistle is numerous in all parts of the State. It occurs in pasture and waste areas and in all crops.

It can be very competitive in pastures and in parts of the Midlands densely infests large areas. The main germination period is in the Autumn but germination in the Spring and early Summer also occurs regularly.



The cotyledon is 15 to 20 mm long, sessile, and hairless. The seedling has a short hypocotyl and no epicotyl. The leaves are produced singly, the first leaves being 20 to 25 mm long with a short merging petiole. The upper surface of the leaves carries a few multi-cellular hairs, and 'warts' from which strong spines arise. The margin is spiny. Later leaves are lobed, the lobes being subdivided into three or four divisions and often rotated until they lie nearly at right angles to the main leaf blade. The lobes, usually four to six in number, are approximately half the width of the leaf blade. The plant develops as a rosette which can reach 750 mm in diameter.

The mature plant is erect with a branching stem reaching 1.5 m in height. The stem is polygonal in cross section with a pithy core which is usually solid but may have a small hollow in the centre. The stem carries both stout hairs and a cobwebby mat of long fine hairs. The stem leaves are sessile, 200 to 250 mm long, and have margins continued down the stem to form wings. The upper surface of the leaf carries stout hairs while the lower surface is covered with a cobwebby mat of fine hairs. The stem leaves are narrower than the rosette leaves and the lobes are wider in proportion. The lobes become long and pointed with strong terminal spines and in their ultimate form may be conical. In the stem leaves there are normally only one to four lobes, with the upper leaves being smaller and having fewer lobes than the lower.

The inflorescences are terminal on the branches, occurring singly or three to four together. They are composite with ligulate florets, purple in colour, and approximately 40 mm in diameter.

Spear Thistle is distinguished from Slender, Californian, and Nodding Thistles in the young stages by the spined 'warts' on the upper leaf surface, and the absence of a paler outlining to the veins. The mature leaves and the flowers are different in shape from those of the other thistles.

Organic Eradication Methods:

Organic eradication can be helped by:

- Cut Plants at ground level before seeding (Preferably dig them out)
- Avoid tilling when weeds have seed heads.
- Burn plants or double bag and take to local refuse site.
- Keeping soil healthy and full of organic matter will help prevent growth or will at the least make pulling weeds out easier.

References:

Images - www.weeds.asn.au

Text sourced from - Tasmanian Weed Handbook (Department of Agriculture – Tasmania)