

PLANT PEST CONTROL

LAND PLANT PESTS

Variegated Thistle: *Silybum marianum*

Why are we worried?

Variegated Thistle is a large, invasive plant which can significantly reduce stock carrying capacities. Dense clumps kill the grass beneath, and pasture regeneration is slow. Plants form ideal hides for rabbits and hares and for further weed infestations.

Wilted plants, either from being cut or sprayed, become very palatable to stock, especially cattle. Cattle gorging on the leaves can die within 24 hours from nitrate poisoning.

What does it look like?

- Variegated thistle is a large plant growing up to 2.5m high and a metre or more wide. Leaves occur alternately up the stems and can be up to 60cm long.
- They are very shiny and have a distinctive variegated appearance due to the white veins and blotches.
- Edges are very spiny.
- Flower heads grow on stout hollow stems and the large purple flowers are surrounded by broad ridged bracts which end in long spines. Each flower can produce up to 200 black to brown seeds, each six to eight mm long with a group of downy hairs at one end.
- The seeds can be spread by stock, birds and machinery.

Where is it found?

Variegated Thistle tends to prefer coastal regions but it is frequently inland. It can be found anywhere in Hawke's Bay. Most areas will contain seeds from previous infestations which may germinate at any time.

What's the best way to control the plant?

The most effect control measure is pasture management. A tight sward prevents thistles germinating while an open pasture is an ideal environment for germination.

Individual plants or small clumps can be grubbed but large infestations are generally sprayed.



Plants are best sprayed in the late autumn to early winter when the plants are at the six-leaf seedling stage. Common chemicals for control at the seedling stage are: MCPB, MCPA and 2-4, D. As plants grow they require higher rates of chemical to be controlled. Spray rates for mature plants will cause severe pasture damage, especially clovers. It is best to seek advice from your chemical representative or Noxious Plants Officer before spraying.

For two weeks following spraying, stock should be excluded to prevent the possibility of nitrate poisoning and to ensure the chemical gets down into the roots.

Mature plants can be controlled by mowing, but for this to be successful plants need to be flowering. Mowing before flowering will cause multi-crown plants which will continue to grow, but if cut during flowering, but before seed set, plants will die. Multi-crown plants are even more difficult to kill.

What biological controls can be used?

Domesticated goats are an effective form of biological control.

For further information

If you think you may have this plant pest on your property, please contact the Biosecurity Plants Officers at Hawke's Bay Regional Council for advice and we will work with you to eradicate it.

Wairoa	0-6-838 8527
Napier	0-6-835 9200
Waipukurau	0-6-858 8636
TOLL FREE	0800 108 838