

**Impacts:** Musk thistle grows in grazing fields, but, due to its spines, cattle will not feed on it. Musk thistle can then mature and spread, out-competing natural vegetation and grazing food.



**\*It is illegal to propagate, sell or transport this plant within the Commonwealth.**

**Suspected Means of Introduction:** Musk Thistle was introduced in the mid-1800's from seed mixes. It is on the Pennsylvania noxious weeds list.

# BioBullies

## Musk Thistle

*Carduus nutans*



**Description:** Musk thistle, a biennial herbaceous plant, is highly aggressive. It is a tall plant, reaching heights up to 6 feet, and has multi-branched, spiny stems. The leaves are dark green and coarsely lobed, with a smooth, waxy surface and a yellowish to white spine at the tip. The purplish colored flower head is larger in diameter, growing up to 3 1/2 inches. Mature flower heads commonly droop at a 90 degree angle.

**Native Range:**  
Europe and Asia

## Resources for Identification and Control of Musk Thistle

Weed of the Week - USDA  
Forest Service

Plant Profile Database -  
USDA

Invasive.org  
University of GA, US Forest  
Service, USDA APHIS

Invasive Plants and  
Reference Guide - USDA  
Forest Service

PA Invasive Exotic Plant  
Fact Sheet - DCNR

# Musk Thistle

## *Carduus nutans*



**Habitat:** Musk Thistle thrives in open natural areas such as meadows, prairies, and grassy fields, and in soil types ranging from neutral to acidic. It does not grow well in excessively wet, dry or shady conditions.

**Biology:** Musk thistle is biennial, meaning it needs 2 years to become mature and reproduce. Reproduction of the musk thistle

is by seeding. The seeds take up to 2 years to develop but can stay dormant for up to 10 years.

**Control Methods:** Musk thistle can be controlled by hand pulling if it is done in the early spring, ensuring that its seeds don't have time to germinate. Chemical control is very effective when used in the fall or early spring.