



DESCRIPTION

Saffron thistle : *Carthamus lanatus*

This is an annual or sometimes biennial thistle, not as widely distributed as some of the more common thistles. It's an upright thistle, with a typical woody, many-branched stem, and lots of sharp spines.

The flowers appear singly, atop flower stems reaching 50cm in height. They're bright yellow with some purple veins, and are surrounded by small, leaf-like bracts that turn downwards from the flower. The saffron thistle flowers from Jan–Apr.

Leaves are glossy green, alternately placed on the stem, and have sharp spines perpendicular to the leaf edges. They're 7-8cm long and about 3cm wide at the base. Rosette leaves have multiple spiny teeth.

The seeds are each topped with silk-like hairs. They're spread by wind and water, and also transported to fresh sites by animals and farm machinery. Where this thistle is present, the seeds will readily contaminate wool.

The root system is a typical thistle taproot.

The saffron thistle can form very dense stands, impenetrable to stock. Pasture productivity is badly compromised by these thistle stands.

Preferred habitat is any arable area, roadsides and waste areas, and pastures with less than optimum cover. It does well in semi-arid conditions, especially where soil fertility is low.

The saffron thistle is distributed occasionally through the eastern parts of the North Island, and the upper and eastern parts of the South Island.

PHYSICAL CONTROL

The best non-chemical defence is to maintain a vigorous and dense pasture cover, and optimum soil fertility. Individual thistles and small infestations can be successfully grubbed out.

HERBICIDE CONTROL

Spot Treatment

- **GrassMate** at 60ml/10L water is an effective treatment for crowned plants.
- **BuckShot** dry granules applied direct to the centre of rosettes, or around the base of crowned plants.

Boom Spraying

- **Glyphosate 360** at 4L/Ha, or **Granny** at 1.8kg/Ha, sprayed onto seedling-infested pasture over late autumn-winter. This is not a pasture-friendly solution, but is effective where pasture damage is not a concern.
- **GrassMate** at 2L/Ha will control seedlings without grass damage, though it will damage clover if present. Higher rates of **GrassMate** used for controlling brushweeds in pastures will also control the thistles at all growth stages.
- **2,4-D Granules** at 1-1.5kg/Ha (seedlings) or 1.5-2kg/Ha (rosettes). Clover damage is minimised where clover is largely dormant, or has been hard grazed shortly before spraying.

