INVASIVE SPECIES ALERT!

Purple Starthistle
(*Centaurea calcitrapa*)

Have You Seen This Plant?

Description

- Annual, biennial, or short-lived perennial that is native to the southern Europe and northern Africa.
- Upright, branched plant that grows up to 1.3 m tall.
- Stems are grooved, covered in resin spots with fine, web-like hairs that disappear as the plant matures.
- Flowers are lavender to deep purple with green to tan coloured spine-tipped bracts up to 3 cm in length.
- Each inflorescence contains 25-40 disk flowers per head.
- Basal leaves are deeply lobed with grey hairs while upper leaves are alternate, small and simple.
- Young rosettes appear grey and woolly with light coloured midribs while mature rosettes have a dense cluster of straw-coloured spines in the centre.
- Seeds are small (0.25 to 0.33 cm), white or brown in colour and hairless.

Flowering Purple Starthistle

Photo: Daniel Montesinos

Primary Threats: Purple Starthistle infestations can contaminate seed and hay crops, and negatively impact recreational activities. Their sharp spines and dense infestations deter wildlife movement and their access to forage.

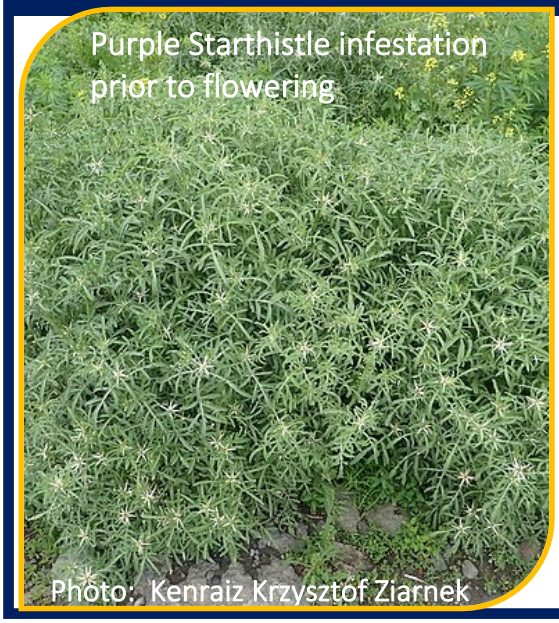

Purple Starthistle infestation prior to flowering

Photo: Kenraiz Krzysztof Ziarnek

Biology & Spread

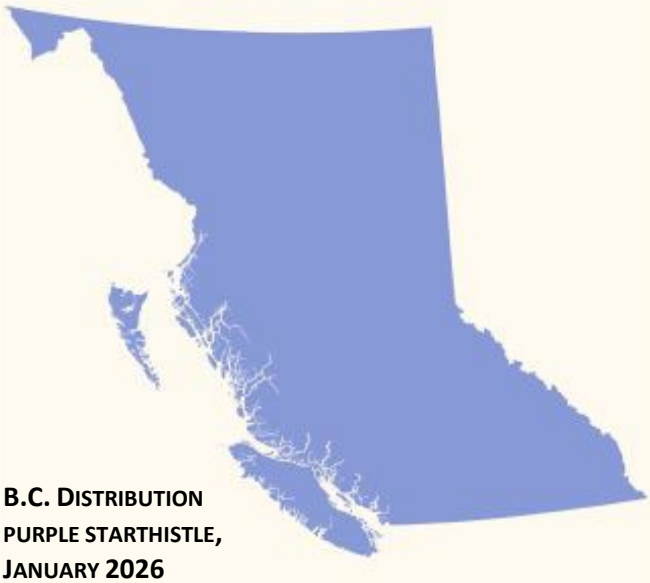
- Purple Starthistle reproduces primarily by seed.
- Flowers bloom from July through September.
- Seedheads fall as a unit, but the individual seeds disperse by vectors such as vehicles, contaminated soil and hay movement, and clinging to people, animals and equipment.
- Buried seeds can remain dormant for 3 years.
- Seeds sprout in the fall or early spring and form spiny rosettes in May and June.

For more information:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species/priority-species/priority-plants

BRITISH COLUMBIA

January 2026

Purple Starthistle (*Centaurea calcitrapa*)



B.C. Distribution
Purple Starthistle,
January 2026

Habitat

- Prefers disturbed sites such as pastures, grasslands and rangelands, along roads, fence lines, ditches, disturbed open sites and logged areas.
- Can colonize most soil types.
- Seldom persists in shaded areas.

Distribution & Status

- Purple Starthistle has not yet established in British Columbia, but scattered infestations have been reported in the United States and Ontario.
- Management goal is prevention of introduction and establishment.

Straw-coloured spine-tipped bracts

Photo: Lies Van Rompaey

Mature Purple Starthistle stems

Photo: Kenraiz Krzysztodf Ziarnek

Report Invasive Species

Download the App!

www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species

What Can You Do?

- **REPORT** new sightings
- **Use** clean grain, hay, and straw
- **Minimize** soil disturbance
- **Clean clothing,** tools and equipment before moving between areas
- **Treat** purple starthistle before disturbing a site with digging, mowing or machinery

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British Columbia