

Pest of the month

Variegated Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)

Variegated thistle is a conspicuous, robust and spiny annual or biennial thistle. The stems can be up to two metres high and 100 millimetres thick. The leaves have white veins and blotches that give a variegated look. The plants can be found in pasture and wasteland and can form dense stands. Large solitary red/purple flowers can be found in November through to January, producing a large number of dark and heavy seeds. The seed is spread by machinery, animals and birds. As the seed can remain viable for more than 20 years, eradication is a long-term task requiring both patience and persistence.



It is a pest for farmers as:

- desirable pasture grasses are suppressed
- high nitrate levels in plants growing on nitrogen-rich soils can be toxic to livestock, especially cattle
- spines on the leaves and stems can cause injury to animals
- dense clumps will impede stock movement and provide habitat for pest animals.

Tasman District has a number of pockets of variegated thistle but due to the efforts of the farming community over the last 30 years, the number of active sites is limited. It is classified as a Progressive Control Pest in the Regional Pest Management Strategy. Land occupiers with variegated thistle on their land are reminded of the requirement to destroy all adult and juvenile plants. Further advice or information on the control measures for this thistle or any other pest plant is available from the Biosecurity Officers at Tasman District Council.