

IBERIAN STARHISTLE (*Centaurea iberica*)

State Noxious Weed List: A-rated



flowerhead



mature plant

IBERIAN STARHISTLE

General description: Upright annual, biennial, or short-lived perennial from a stout taproot. Seedlings develop straw-colored spines in the center of the rosette of leaves. Mature plant grows to heights of up to 3 feet. The lobed lower leaves are 4 to 8 inches long, upper stem leaves are not winged as in yellow starthistle. Stem leaves are alternate, pinnately divided, and distinctly dotted with resin.

Flowers and seeds: Blooms from July to October. Flowerheads consist of rose-pink to whitish flowers, each flower 5/8 to 7/8 inch long. Flowerhead bracts 3/4 inch long, body 1/4 to 1/2 inch wide. Bracts (phyllaries) and central spines resemble those of purple starthistle, but are often slightly smaller. Most seed germinates the first year, but buried seed can remain dormant for about 3 years.

Habitat: Similar to other *Centaurea* species, grows in fields, roadsides, disturbed open sites, grasslands, overgrazed rangelands, and logged areas. Plants seldom persist in shaded places and colonize most soil types with disturbed topsoil. Iberian starthistle often colonizes banks of water courses and other moist sites.

Mechanism of spread: Little is known, but probably similar to purple starthistle (seeds disperse with the seed head as a unit).

Impacts: Displaces native plants, reduces forage for wildlife and livestock, spines are injurious to people and animals.

Origin and distribution: Native to southeast Eurasia. In our 3-county area Iberian starthistle is only known to occur in Piney Creek drainage of northeastern Mariposa County, where it is under eradication. Any new occurrences would be highly significant and should be reported immediately.

Important control hints: Similar to purple starthistle. Hand removal works if most of the stout root is removed, and may need to be done 2 to 4 times a year. See pages 4 and 5 for more information about control.

PURPLE STARHISTLE (*Centaurea calcitrapa*)

State Noxious Weed List: B-rated



purple starthistle flowerhead - full bloom



mature plants



infestation

PURPLE STARHISTLE

General description: Biennial (sometimes annual or perennial depending on the growing conditions). First forms a rosette, then sends up a stem that grows into a branched, mound-like form. Plants range from 6 inches to 4 feet tall. Rosette leaves are gray-hairy when young. Older rosette leaves generally form a circle of spines in the middle of the rosette. Largest stem leaves are 4 to 8 inches long, and are variably lobed.

Flowers and seeds: Flowering period is July to October. Flowerheads contain purple disc flowers. Flowerhead bracts are spine-tipped, with long, spreading spines (1/2 to 1 inch long), each surrounded by smaller spines. Seeds are white or streaked with brown, and lack bristles. Spines do not fall from the flowerhead bracts at the end of the season. Seeds may be viable for 3 or more years.

Habitat: Generally prefers disturbed areas on deep, often alluvial soils.

Mechanism of spread: Reproduces by seed. Seeds remain in the seed head and most fall near the parent plant. Others are moved as the wind blows dried pieces of the parent plant, or are transported in contaminated hay/straw, or on equipment.

Impacts: Devalues rangeland by reducing forage and impeding access. The spines are thicker than those of

yellow starthistle, and remain on the plant after flowering, making grazing lands inaccessible.

Origin and distribution: Native to the Mediterranean region of Europe and Africa. First documented in California in 1886. Purple starthistle is found throughout much of California in non-desert areas. Infestation is especially heavy in the San Francisco Bay area. It is also found in more than a dozen other states. Only one occurrence is known in our 3-county area; a small infestation on a ranch outside of Fresno.

Important control hints: Hand pulling or digging can control small infestations, but must be done at least 3 years in a row. Mowing is generally not effective for purple starthistle. See pages 4 and 5 for more information about control.