

SPEAR THISTLE – *Cirsium vulgare*

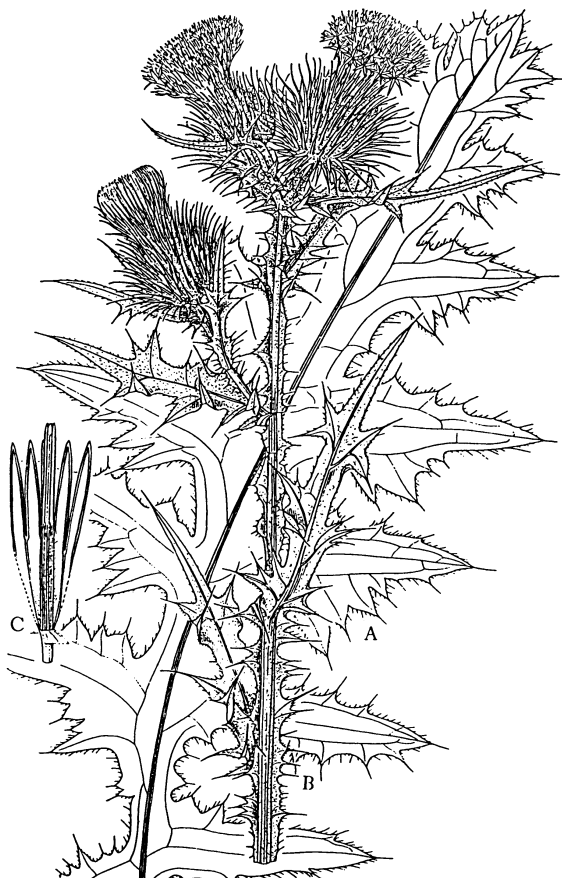
other common names: Scotch Thistle, Bell Thistle



Mature plant



Young plant



Cirsium vulgare

Spear Thistle

A, upper half of radical leaf, in outline, hairs omitted;
B, flowering branch; C, upper part of flower cut away to show
the stamens. *Not to scale.*

Young Plant:

Seedling plants appear from autumn until April in pasture and on bare ground. The cotyledons differ from those of creeping thistle in that they are borne on short stalks. The true leaves are also longer and more bristly with a downy appearance to the upper surfaces. The seedling plants quickly form rosettes which remain for at least one year before producing flowering stems.

Adult plant:

The flowering stems begin to emerge from the rosettes when the basal leaves reach 15-30cm in length. These stems typically reach 30-100cm in height, but taller specimens occur. Stems are cottony or minutely hairy, bearing discontinuous wings and leaves which are also spiny and deeply lobed.

From July onwards plants produce large purple flower heads 3-5cm long by 2-5cm across, in loose clusters forming the stereotype image of a thistle. The flowering stems die back after producing seeds.

Other thistle species not prescribed in the Weeds Act 1959:

Marsh thistle – *Cirsium palustre* – this more closely resembles spear thistle than creeping thistle, but has continuous, spiny wings along the stem.

The thistles listed overleaf are not readily confused with creeping or spear thistle but special care should be taken not to damage these uncommon species.