

Silybum marianum (L.) Gaertn.

Standardized Common Name: Milk Thistle

Other Common Names: Lady's Thistle, Marian Thistle, Mary's Thistle, Spotted Thistle

Family: Asteraceae (Compositae)

Taxonomy: *Silybum* includes two species of thistle. Both are native to the Mediterranean; *S. marianum* has become a wide-ranging weed.

Description: Annual or biennial herb, 0.2–1.5 m high. Leaves in basal rosette and cauline; basal leaves 25–50 cm long, petiolate, coarsely pinnatisect; cauline leaves sessile with auriculate bases, unlobed or pinnatilobed, glabrous, dark green with white veins or spots; margins denticulate, bearing spines up to 8 mm long. Inflorescences terminal heads (capitula), ovoid, 2.5–4 cm wide; receptacular bracts (phyllaries) variable in shape, most ending in recurved spines 2–5 cm long; receptacle hairy. Florets all disk florets, hermaphroditic, purple; corolla tubular, 3–4 cm long, the uppermost portion widening abruptly and 5-lobed; pappus a single ring of white to pale yellow hairs, (11–)15–20 mm long, fused at the base; anthers and style purplish. Fruit an achene (technically a cypsela), narrowly obovate to oblong, 6–7(–8) mm long, 2.5–3(–4) mm broad, with small collar at apex, varying from pale grayish brown to deep brown or black, often mottled.

Parts in Commerce: Fruits

Identification:

- 6–7(–8) mm long, narrowly obovate to oblong, somewhat flattened
- Base narrower than apex, with hilum to one side, not sharply indented or curved
- Apex somewhat asymmetrical, with circular yellow collar (remains of pappus base), style base protruding beyond collar
- Surface shiny, smooth, not with conspicuous longitudinal ridge(s)
- Color pale grey-brown to blackish brown, often mottled and appearing streaky under magnification
- Taste oily, bitter
- Pappus (usually missing) is a single ring of hairs, 11–20 mm long, white to pale yellow, fused at base and easily detached from fruit

References:

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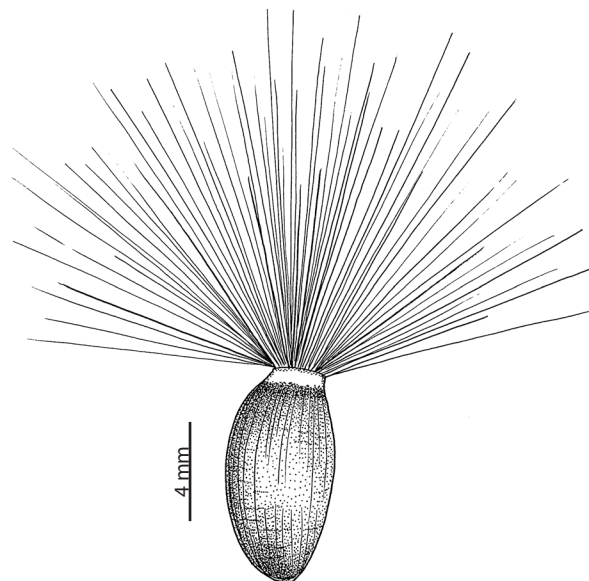


Figure 69: *Silybum marianum* fruit.