



**Scotch Thistle**  
*Onopordum acanthium*

Height: 6 feet

Spread: 12 inches

Spacing: 8 inches

Sunlight: ☉

Hardiness Zone: 4b

Other Names: Cotton Thistle, Winged Thistle

**Description:**

This robust biennial produces a foliage rosette the first year, and flower stems in the second; large pinkish-purple flowers crown the stems in summer; very spiny, so handle with caution

**Ornamental Features**

Scotch Thistle features bold hot pink pincushion flowers with purple overtones at the ends of the stems from early to mid summer. Its attractive spiny narrow leaves remain silver in color throughout the season.

**Landscape Attributes**

Scotch Thistle is an herbaceous perennial with a rigidly upright and towering form. Its medium texture blends into the garden, but can always be balanced by a couple of finer or coarser plants for an effective composition.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, and is best cleaned up in early spring before it resumes active growth for the season. It is a good choice for attracting bees, butterflies and hummingbirds to your yard, but is not particularly attractive to deer who tend to leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Invasive
- Spiny

Scotch Thistle is recommended for the following landscape applications;



*Scotch Thistle flowers*  
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



*Scotch Thistle in bloom*  
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

- Mass Planting
- General Garden Use
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens
- Container Planting

### **Planting & Growing**

Scotch Thistle will grow to be about 6 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 12 inches. When grown in masses or used as a bedding plant, individual plants should be spaced approximately 8 inches apart. It grows at a fast rate, and tends to be biennial, meaning that it puts on vegetative growth the first year, flowers the second, and then dies. As an herbaceous perennial, this plant will usually die back to the crown each winter, and will regrow from the base each spring. Be careful not to disturb the crown in late winter when it may not be readily seen!

This plant should only be grown in full sunlight. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It is not particular as to soil type or pH. It is highly tolerant of urban pollution and will even thrive in inner city environments. This species is not originally from North America.

Scotch Thistle is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor pots and containers. With its upright habit of growth, it is best suited for use as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.