

# ANNUAL AND SPINY SOWTHISTLE

[*Sonchus oleraceus* L. and *Sonchus asper* (L.) Hill]



Annual sowthistle



Spiny sowthistle



# ANNUAL AND SPINY SOWTHISTLE

State Noxious Weeds List: **No.**

These sowthistle species are from Europe and now are established widely in the region. The plants often are mistaken for perennial sowthistle. However, perennial sowthistle has a creeping perennial root system and larger and longer leaves, and grows 4 to 6 feet tall. Annual and spiny sowthistle often are found along roadsides and in waste areas, gardens and cultivated fields.

Identification and growth form:

Annual and spiny sowthistle are both annuals and differ primarily in leaf form. Spiny sowthistle, as the name implies, has sharp, stiff prickles along the stem and leaves. Leaves clasp the stem with rounded basal lobes (auricles) that resemble a ram's horn. Annual sowthistle leaves are deeply toothed lower on the plant but progressively less so on the upper stem and auricles are distinctly pointed. Both species have yellow flowers, borne on a long vaselike involucre, with several in a cluster. Annual and spiny sowthistle contain a milky latex and both grow from a small taproot. Spiny sowthistle has slightly larger flower heads (0.5 to 1 inch across) compared with annual sowthistle (0.25 to 0.75 inch). The seeds for both are flattened with three to five ribs. Both species grow 2 to 4 feet tall.

Why is this plant a concern?

These annual sowthistle species can become competitive in cropland, but otherwise are more nuisance species than invasive. Because annual and spiny sowthistle often are found in waste areas and heavily used ground, such as parking lots and trails, they can be an indicator that land is being overgrazed or otherwise abused when these species start to appear in pasture and hay land.

How do I control these plants?

Annual and perennial sowthistle species are not true thistles and control options differ between these weed families.

**Chemical.** Products that contain metsulfuron such as Escort or Ally are very effective in controlling sowthistle species. Commonly used herbicides for Canada thistle control such as Milestone (aminopyralid), Tordon (picloram) and dicamba (various) are less effective and require higher use rates.

**Cultural.** Cultivation will control annual sowthistle species in cropland.

**Biological.** No biological control agents or pathogens are available for these weeds.