

Common Name: **Milk Thistle**

Genus: *Silybum*

Species: *marianum*

Family: Asteraceae

AKA: Our Lady's Thistle, Marian Thistle



## Historical Uses:

**Medical:** “*Galen* writeth, that the roots of *spina alba* do drie and moderately binde, that therefore it is good for those that be troubled with the lask (diarrhea) and the bloody flux, that it staieth bleeding, washeth away cold swellings, easeth the paine of the teeth if they bee washed with the decoction thereof. The seed thereof is of a thin essence and hot facultie, therefore he saith that it is good for those that be troubled with cramps. *Dioscorides* affirmeth that the seeds being drunke are a remedie for infants that have their sinews drawne together, and for those that be bitten of serpents: and that it is thought to drive away serpents, if it be but hanged about the necke.” (1)

“It strengthens the stomach, stops the spitting of blood, relieves spasms and toothache, destroys boils and abscesses, and restrains hemorrhages. It is given as a diuretic and to control chronic diarrhea. It also disperses swellings of the mouth, helps the thirst of infants bitten by venomous creatures, is good for sciatica, represses pain, can act as an emetic, is styptic, cleanses and restricts the menstrual flow, and restores circulation to diseased members and contracted sinews”. (2)

“*Silybum* is a broad *Acantha*, having leaves like white *Chamaeleon* which being but newly sprung up is eaten sodden with oil, and salt. But ye juice of ye root being drunk with *Melicrate*, as much as a dragm, doth provoke vomitings.” (3)

**Culinary:** “The tender leaves, the prickles taken off, are sometimes used to bee eaten with other herbes.” (4).

**Folklore/Astrology:** “When worn about the neck or held over poisonous animals, it prevents all harm from them. The white points on it leaves have been there ever since some of the Virgin’s milk accidentally stained them.” (5)



## Contemporary Uses:

**Parts Used:** “Whole plant, seeds, leaves, flower buds, roots. For medical use, plants are cut when flowering and seeds collected when ripe.” (6)

**Medicinal:** “A bitter, diuretic, tonic herb that regenerates liver cells, stimulates bile flow, increases milk production, and relaxes spasms. Used internally for liver and gall bladder diseases, jaundice, hepatitis, liver damage, cirrhosis, and poisoning. Also used to minimize the effects of chemotherapy.” (7)

**Culinary:** “Young leaves, with spines removed, are eaten raw or cooked as a spinach-like vegetable. Flower buds can be eaten like mini-artichokes. Tender roots of the first-year plant are similar to salsify.” (8)

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**Area of Origin:** Southwestern Europe and North Africa

**Physical description:** “Stout annual or biennial with a basil rosette of white marbled, deeply lobed, ovate leaves which have spiny margins.” (9)

**Plant type:** Annual or biennial

**Height:** Can reach 4 to 5ft.

**Flower color:** Purple, thistle-like

**Flowering period:** Summer

**Soil type/requirements:** Well-drained, neutral to alkaline soil

**Hardiness zone:** USDA 7-8

**Sun requirements:** Full sun

**Propagation:** Seed sown in summer or early autumn

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## **Bibliography**

1. Gerard, p. 1149-1150
2. Anderson, p.298-299
3. Dioscorides, p.554
4. Gerard, p. 1149-1150
5. Anderson, p.298-299
6. Bown, p. 368
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. Ibid

## **Illustrations:**

1. Fuchs Herbal 1543
2. PSUMG 2011
3. PSUMG 2011



Close-up of the Thistle flower



Plant in situ