PLANT FACT SHEET

Silybum marianum (L.) Gaertner

GENUS *Silybum* **FAMILY** Asteraceae

COMMON NAMES Milk thistle, Holy thistle

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Stems, Leaves, Roots, bud, Oil, Seeds

The prickles must be removed then the leaves can be eaten raw in salads or cooked. They are used in stews. The leaves are used for sarma in Turkey. They are rolled around a filling of rice or minced meat.
Young stems are peeled, boiled and eaten.
The bases of the flower heads can be eaten. They are used in soup. They are also used in cheese making.
The roots can be cooked and eaten. They are used as famine food after boiling in water.
The seeds contain an edible fatty oil. They can also be roasted and used as a coffee substitute. The unripe seeds are eaten raw.
CAUTION: In fertile soils plants can contain high nitrate levels which are poisonous.

DESCRIPTION

An annual herb. It is stout and erect. It grows 1-3 m tall. The leaves are shiny and green. They have a white mottle or marks on the upper surface. The lower leaves grow out from the main stem in a ring. The upper leaves clasp the stem. They are 10-50 cm long by 5-25 cm wide. They have rounded wings. The flower heads are reddish-purple. They are at the top of the plant. They have broad ridged bracts around them. These end in spines. The seedling leaves are free of spines.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It usually grows on volcanic or alluvial soils rich in nitrogen. It grows in damp areas. It can grow in arid places. In Argentina it grows between sea level to 1,500 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 6-10. Tasmania Herbarium.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown by seed.

NOTES

There are 2 Silybum species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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