

The Enemy: Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*)

Strategy: This annual from Russia was introduced in the late 1880's. It is one of the worst weeds in the drier regions on North America. It is a round, bushy, much branched plant that generally grows to a height of 3 feet. Early in the summer the somewhat long leaves are soft and string like. Once the plant starts to mature the leaves develop a short spine that becomes quite stiff, thus giving it the characteristic of a *thistle* (although not related to a true thistle). The plant develops a small purple-red flower at the base of the upper leaves. It is most prevalent in dry-land grain crops, parking lots, roadsides, overgrazed dry pastures, and other highly disturbed sites.

Attack: When the plant dies off it becomes this round 'Tumbleweed' that we see in all the old western movies. This tumble effect is nature's way of dispersing the seeds. With the bushy characteristic of the plant it competes for all the nutrients and moisture as well as blocks the sunlight necessary for other plants to thrive. The plant becomes quite a nuisance during harvest as well as when it tumbles into irrigation corridors and fences where it becomes quite a problem and fire hazard.

Defense: As this is an annual it can be controlled mechanically. Although edible for humans and animals, most animals will not graze on the plant due to it gets larger and develops the short spines. Many herbicides are effective early in the life cycle of the plant. This plant has become quite **resistant** to many of the common herbicides, therefore, product combinations and new chemistries of the pesticide must be considered. Best products to use are Banvel (Weedmaster) and Fluroxypyr (Vista or Starane). Due to the resistant issue, product rotation and selection should be evaluated with Professional Crop Consultants and County Weed Supervisors. In the late summer it is best controlled with a mower as mature plants are not susceptible to herbicides. Early and often treatments starting mid spring is best.