

# Spear Thistle

**Scientific Name:** *Cirsium vulgare*

**Irish Name:** Feochadán colgach



### Family

Thistles are related to daisies and dandelions, all of which belong to a large family known as **Composite** flowers.

This is one of the largest groups of Irish wild flowers. Each 'flower' is in fact a dense cluster of florets or tiny flowers in flat or domed heads - imitating a single flower.



### FACT FILE

**Habitat:** Pastures, roadsides and waste ground.

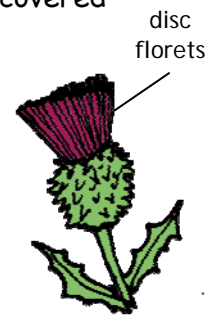
**Colour:** Purple.

**Height:** 50-180 cm.

**S**pear Thistle is a large plant that is usually found on waste ground. It is biennial, which means it takes two years to grow from seed to flower to fruit - and then the plant dies.

At the end of the first year, the thistle plant looks like a wheel-like rosettes of large, wavy leaves. These leaves are cut into lobes that end in a sharp spine and are covered beneath with cotton-like hairs.

The spear thistle has purple flower-heads, made up of loose clusters of disc florets. The flower heads, which are armed with spines, are on branched flowering stems, with spiny wings.



Each 'petal' is an individual floret

The plant is good for wildlife, its flowers provide food for nectar-loving insects, such as bees, as it also provides shelter for other insects. Many people consider thistles to be weeds.

### Seeds that travel...

The seeds of the spear thistle are like a parachute of hair, holding a 1-seeded fruit. These are known as 'thistledown'. These parachutes are carried great distances by the wind and when it lands in suitable conditions, it grows into a new plant. Each flower head produces over 100 seeds.

