

Salsola kali

Russian thistle, tumbleweed

Salsola kali L.

Family: Chenopodiaceae

Description: Much branched, soft shrub. Leaves reduced, tipped with spines. Plant appears leafless. Flowers small, white. Tiny seed black, shiny. Mature plants break off at soil line and roll with the wind, dispersing seed⁽⁷⁰⁾, collecting at fences and other barriers. *Salsola*, salty, for habitat or taste; *kali*, *kalium*, potassium, for alkaline habitat.

Distribution: Native to Eurasia. Naturalized widely in North America and Australia⁽⁷⁰⁾. In Hawai‘i, found in the Kamuela area near the cement plant, from whence it has spread toward Waikoloa and the Saddle Road. Also in East Maui in the Pūlehu District near the Maui Agricultural Park (Pat Bily, TNC).

Environmental impact: The area where Russian thistle occurs is also infested with fountaingrass. Grass fires are annual threats. There is concern that ignited Russian thistle plants may spread fires as they roll along.

Management: Cattle will graze the plant, and fence lines bar the movement of detached plants. These may be the reasons Russian thistle has not spread faster than it has. It is very sensitive to hormone-type dicot killers.

