

## ASTER FAMILY

### ASTERACEAE

# Spiny-leaved Sow Thistle.

*Sonchus asper.*

Found in cultivated fields, and along roadsides, in August.

The stalk is either simple, or branching near the top, from 2 to 3 or 4 feet high, large, round, and very hollow like a tube, and juicy; it is grooved, and smooth to the touch. The color is green, sometimes streaked with red near the foot.

The leaf is very long (sometimes 10 inches), lance-shaped with a tapering point, and noticeable rounded wing-like bases; the margin is deeply and irregularly toothed, and the edge is rolled under, thus making the teeth sharp-pointed, and stiff, like little spines; the midrib is prominent beneath, wide, flat, and pale above; underneath many veins show; the texture is thin, and the surface is smooth. The upper side is a cool clear green, the underside silvery, with a pale bloom. It is clasping, the prolonged bases flaring like wings on either side of the stalk.



The flowers are tiny and downy; light yellow in color; gathered in a flat-topped head (which is less than an inch across), enclosed in a small vase-shaped, green, and leafy cup. The heads are set on slender stems, in loose terminal groups, or singly on short leafy stems from the angles of the leaves; at the junction of these foot-stems small, oval leaves occur.

Nothing could be more suggestive of decorative design than the fine arch and spring of this leaf, with its ornamental winged clasps; and its refinement of color is an added excellence. The highly inappropriate folk-name (it is said to be a favorite article of diet among the English swine) should be abolished, and the plant called instead The Gothic Thistle in memory of a school who could appreciate its sculptural significance better than the moderns.

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Text and drawing excerpted from *Wildflowers from the North-Eastern States* by Ellen Miller and Margaret Christine Whiting, 1895  
Nomenclature and Families updated.