

NOXIOUS WEED ALERT

CANADA THISTLE

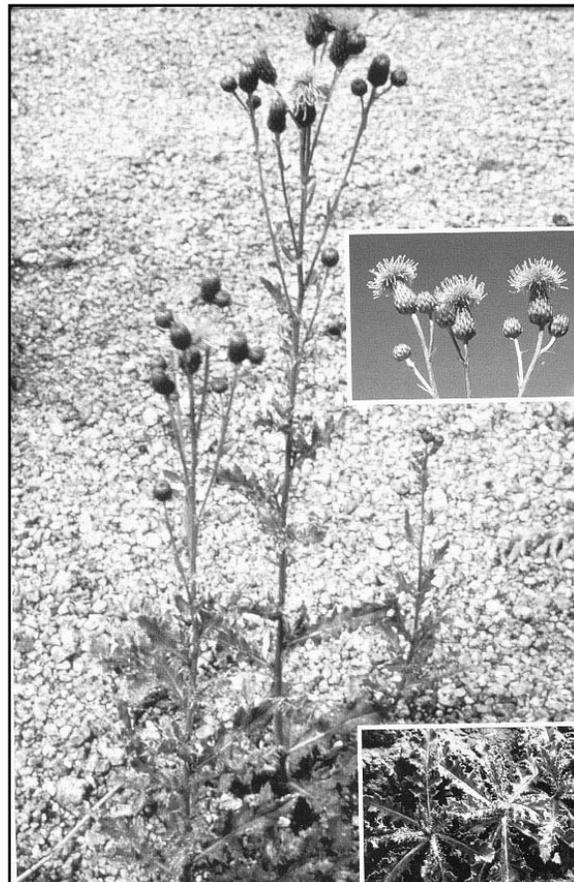
(*Cirsium arvense*)

- Canada thistle grows one to four feet tall.
- The stems are prickly, erect and branched near the top.
- The leaves vary from light to dark green; they are lance shaped, spiny and deeply cut.
- The flowers heads are smooth and occur in small clusters. Flowers are light lavender to purple, sometimes white.
- The roots are fleshy, **creeping** and extensive.
- The seeds are smooth, brown, pointed and approximately 1/8 inch long.

Look-a-likes:

Bull thistle, (*Cirsium vulgare*), is similar to Canada thistle, **except:**

- the flower heads are larger, deep purple and spiny;
- the leaves are larger and more spiny;
- the leaves have prickly hairs on the upper surface; Canada thistle leaves are smooth.



Bull thistle is a Class C weed.

Edible thistle, (*Cirsium edule*), a native thistle which is found mainly in the western part of the county, has soft leaves and a very hairy, drooping flower head. It is harmless and non-invasive.

Distribution:

Canada thistle is conspicuous on many roads and pastures in Clallam County.

WHY BE CONCERNED?

- Canada thistle invades many types of habitat, displacing native vegetation and decreasing species diversity.
- It presents an economic threat to farmers because it competes with crops and reduces crop yield.

Canada thistle is a Class C weed.

Ecology:

- Canada thistle grows in almost any type of environment but does not tolerate shade.
- It is a perennial and can reproduce by seed.
- Reproduction is mainly by horizontal roots which have buds that sprout and develop into new plants. Roots need not be attached to the parent plant; root fragments as small as half an inch can grow into new plants.

CONTROL

Prevention and early detection are the best means of control!

- **Practice** good pasture management; avoid overgrazing, irrigate and fertilize as needed, and reseed bare ground. A healthy pasture will resist weed invasion.
- **Use** weed free hay and seed; avoid introducing weed contaminated soil.
- **Clean** equipment that has been used in infested areas.
- **Remove** seedlings when young; newly established plants can usually be pulled without leaving root fragments in the ground.
- **Replant** newly weeded areas with desirable (preferably native) plant species that will discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly, bag or burn seed heads or fragments that may resprout.
- **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

HANDPULLING the plants and digging out the roots can be successful on newer infestations, but care must be taken to remove and dispose of all root fragments. Segments as small as 1 inch, left in or on the ground, can grow into a new plant. Dispose of plants that have bloomed because they can continue developing and produce seeds.

MOWING several times during the growing season will prevent food production in the leaves and deplete the food reserves stored in the roots. This strategy can “starve” the plant to death, but may require many years to succeed. If eradication is desired, other methods may have to be included.

HERBICIDES can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying an herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount. For perennial weeds, long term control requires stopping seed production **and** attacking the weed’s root system. Translocated herbicides, (ones that move throughout a plant’s system), such as Roundup™ (glyphosate), Curtail™ (2,4-D + clopyralid), Stinger™ (clopyralid) and Banvel™ (dicamba) are recommended.

- **Note:** Roundup™ is non-selective and will damage all plants. The other chemicals will target only broad-leaved plants.
- **Timing** of application is important. Apply herbicide to **actively growing** plants just prior to flowering (bud stage), or early to mid-flowering, depending on the chemical (check your label). Applications to regrowth in the fall, (before freezing occurs) are very effective because the chemical is readily moved with sugars being sent to the roots for winter storage.
- **Cutting** back the plant three to five weeks before applying herbicide will encourage active growth. Applications to active growth increase effectiveness because the herbicide moves around the plant more quickly. Also, herbicide is more easily absorbed by clean, new leaves which have not developed the thickened cuticle (waxy coating) present on mature leaves, which resists herbicide penetration.

Prepared by the **Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board**; revised 3/2015

For more information call: **(360) 417-2442**

or see www.clallam.net/weed