



# Control Options for Canada Thistle and Bull Thistle



## General Information

The two common thistles in Whatcom County are Canada thistle and bull thistle. It is important to accurately identify the species of thistle you are trying to control, as control methods differ between the two species. Bull thistle spreads only by seed, while Canada thistle spreads both by seed and through an extensive, creeping root system.

## Manual/Mechanical Techniques

Bull thistle is easier to control manually than Canada thistle. Small stands of bull thistle can be controlled through hand removal. Plants should be dug, taking care to remove as much of the root system as possible. Disturbance of the soil during manual control may cause the



germination of any thistle seeds in the soil, so the area should be monitored to control any new seedlings. Canada thistle is more difficult to control manually because of its creeping root system. Repeated mowings when the plant has tight flower buds can help decrease the number of plants. Tilling Canada thistle will spread the plants by root pieces, but repeated tilling of bull thistle can decrease the number of plants. As stated previously, it is very important to identify the two species correctly before you try to manage them.

## Chemical Recommendations

Thistles can be controlled using specific herbicides. When using herbicides, always read and follow label directions for rates, spraying conditions, personal protective equipment and grazing intervals. Do not spray when it is windy or raining, or when rain is forecast. Do not cut sprayed plants for at least 2 weeks after herbicide application. Herbicides should not be sprayed within 60 feet of water bodies and creeks, without further consultation with the Noxious Weed Board. Remember, it is the herbicide applicators responsibility to apply the product in accordance to the instructions on the label.

Aminopyralid (sold as Milestone) can be applied in the spring to plants in the pre-bud stage and in the fall, at a rate of 5-7 fluid ounces per acre for Canada thistle and 3-5 fluid ounces per acre for bull thistle. This herbicide can damage many other plants and can only be used in specified (mainly agricultural) locations.

2,4-D (marketed under a variety of brands) can be applied in the spring and fall to bull thistle plants in the rosette stage. Follow label directions for mixing the appropriate solution strength.

Dicamba, either alone or combined with 2,4-D (as in Weedmaster) can be used on bull thistle when the rosettes are actively growing in the spring or fall. It can be used on Canada thistle when plants are actively growing. Follow label directions for mixing the appropriate solution strength.

Glyphosate (marketed as Round-up and many other brands) can be applied to Canada thistle plants at or beyond the bud stage. An herbicide containing a 40% or higher concentration of glyphosate should be used, and it should be mixed to a 2% product spray solution. Glyphosate will kill grass and other vegetation so care should be taken if used around desired vegetation. The loss of surrounding plants also may allow germination of any thistle seeds in the soil.

Spray plants until they are just wet. NEVER apply Round-up or other herbicides to standing water unless they are distinctly labeled for aquatic use. Ingredients in these products may be toxic to fish.

- **Always read and understand the label of the herbicides you choose to use.**
- **More is NOT better when using herbicides, and may actually hinder the ability of the herbicide to injure the target plant if the solution is too strong. This wastes money and effort and puts more product into the environment than is necessary. ALWAYS follow the recommended rates on the label.**
- **With all herbicides, when you apply them is as important as how you apply them.**

*The mention of a specific product brand name in this document is not, and should not be construed as an endorsement or as a recommendation for the use of that product.* Herbicide information is taken from the WSU Pacific Northwest Weed Management Handbook 2010.