

## NOXIOUS WEED FACT SHEET

# *Canada Thistle* (*Cirsium arvense*)



FAMILY: ASTERACEAE



### Description:

Canada thistle is an aggressive perennial, seedlings emerge mid- to-late spring and form rootstocks when they are 3 weeks old. Stems emerge from a basal rosette reaching 1 to 4 feet tall that branch into clusters of lavender to deep rose-purple flowers that are urn-shaped and bractless. Flowering generally occurs from July to August. Male and female flowers are found on different plants and both must be present to produce viable seeds.

Leaves are spine-tipped and wavy, growing alternately and slightly clasping the stem. Leaf color ranges from light to dark green. Sharp spines are numerous on the outer edges of leaves, branches and main stem of the plant.

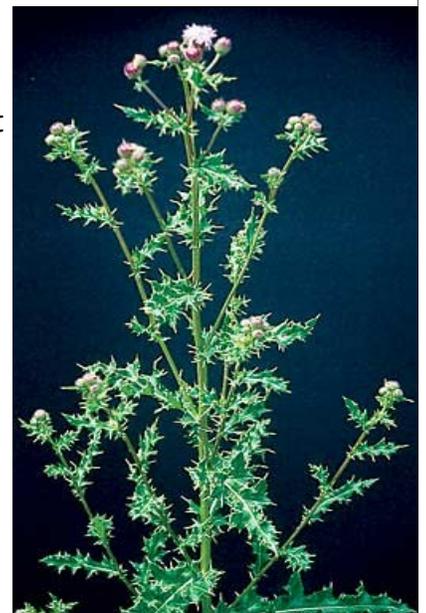
Horizontal roots extend 15 feet or more and vertical roots grow 6 to 15 feet deep. Canada thistle can reproduce by seed, but most of its spread can be contributed to the lateral roots sending up new shoots each year. The wind helps disseminate seed, but most often, the cotton breaks off, leaving the seed attached to the plant. The seeds of a Canada thistle plant can remain viable in the soil for up to 20 years.

### Habitat:

Canada Thistle infests crops, pasture, rangeland, roadsides, stream banks and landscaping. It can spread quickly to form dense colonies, crowding out forage grasses by up to 60 percent. Most grazing animals avoid Canada Thistle infested areas due to spiny leaves that can lead to mouth irritations and infections.

### Control Methods:

Canada Thistle is one of the most difficult weeds to control and requires a long-term, integrated approach. The large root reserves provide energy to the plant allowing it to put out new growth in the spring or when the ground is disturbed. The key to controlling it is to stress the plant and deplete its root reserves. That is why control in the spring and fall is so important. You want to make sure you have depleted the reserves before it has a chance to over-winter.

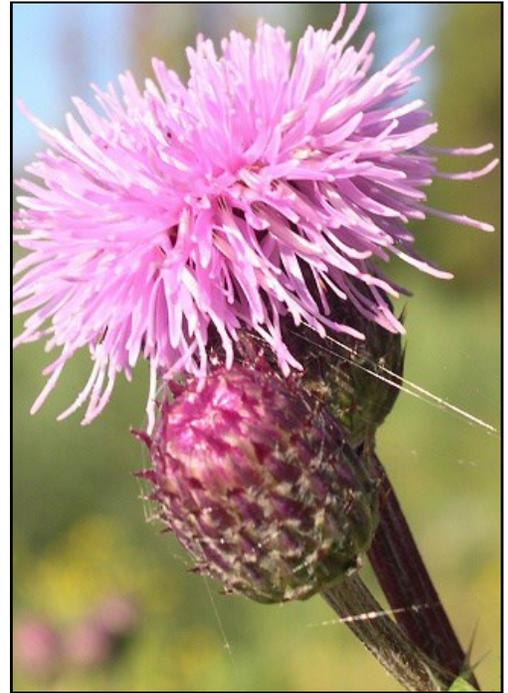


**Mechanical Control** — Cultivate at regular intervals, every 21 days; repeat until the first killing frost. Each root segment can produce shoots 15 days after tillage, they have enough energy to develop new plants and can survive 100 days in the soil.

Mowing stimulates new thistle shoots to develop. It is a good idea to combine mowing or cultivation with chemical control. After tillage or mowing, allow the thistle to reach 6-8 inches, spray with a herbicide and resume tillage or mowing 10-14 days after spraying.

**Biological Control** — Bio's are limited in their impact on the plant. Stem weevils, bud weevils and gall flies attack different parts of the plant. Refer to our Biological Control of Noxious Weeds handout for additional information.

**Chemical Control** — Spray when plant is actively growing and majority of leaves have emerged, but prior to bud stage. For spot treatments during the bud stage use glyphosate. As the thistles grow past the bud stage, control will decrease, but fall applications can be made if there is adequate moisture and regrowth.



**Recommended herbicides:**

<b>May, June</b> <i>Seedling/Rosette</i>	<b>July</b> <i>Bolting, Bud, Bloom</i>	<b>August, September, October</b> <i>Flowering, Seed, Fall Regrowth</i>
WeedMaster, Range Star, Rifle D	Tordon* + 2,4-D	Tordon* + 2.4-D
Curtail	Telar	<b>Fall regrowth</b>
Tordon*	Milestone	Banvel
Milestone	Roundup (spot spray in bud stage)	Milestone
Prescott		Telar

\* **Tordon®** is the trade name for picloram and is a restricted use herbicide.

Read and follow all label instructions when applying herbicides. Trade names have been used to simplify instructions and no endorsement or warranty is expressed or implied.

**Spokane County Noxious Weed Control Board**

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For additional information on Noxious Weeds and the State Weed Law, visit our website at:

[www.spokanecounty.org/weedboard](http://www.spokanecounty.org/weedboard)



Canada thistle (above) and Bull thistle (left) are often mistaken for each other at this stage of growth.