**JEFFERSON COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL BOARD**

# F A C T  S H E E T

# 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, shiny, spiny and deeply cut.
- The flower 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.
- Sunflower family

**LOOK ALIKES:**

**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 entire plant has a bluish-gray appearance

**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 Jefferson 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 Noxious Weed.**

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**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. Fragments as small as 1 inch, left in or on the ground, can grow into a new plant. Dispose of plants that have bloomed because flowers 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 several years to succeed.

**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 a 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) are recommended. These are most effective on young, actively growing plants because the herbicide moves around the plant more quickly. Also, herbicide is more easily absorbed by clean, new leaves that have not developed the thickened cuticle (waxy coating) present on mature leaves, which resists herbicide penetration.

- **Cutting** back the plant three to five weeks before applying herbicide will encourage active growth.

**Call the Weed Board for specific herbicide advice.**

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