

# Meadow Knapweed

*Centaurea jacea x nigra*

Sunflower Family

## Class B Noxious Weed: Control Required

### Identification Tips

- Hybrid perennial with variable traits
- Upright branched stems, up to 4 feet tall
- Solitary flowering head at the ends of branches
- Flowers pink to reddish-purple in color
- Flower heads oval, almost globe-shaped
- Bracts (found under the flower head) have distinctive comblike fringe near tip
- Basal leaves are up to 4 inches long and slender, often shallowly lobed
- Stem leaves much smaller, not lobed
- Leaves are coarse and tough

### Biology

- Well adapted to western Washington soils and climate
- Hybrid species as the result of crossbreeding of black and brown knapweeds
- Woody root crown
- Flowers July to September
- Seeds can spread great distances

### Impacts

- Out-competes grasses and other pasture species, reducing forage for wildlife and livestock
- Highly difficult to remove once established

### Distribution

- Has become a significant problem in many Western Washington counties where it is much more aggressive than in eastern Washington
- Found along roadsides, river banks and in pastures, moist meadows and forest openings
- Also establishes quickly in newly disturbed areas such as industrial sites, quarries and tree farms



Cindy Roche, www.forestryimages.org



Rosettes form in the spring (insert) then produce stems and flowers in the summer.



Once established, this weed is very difficult to remove.

### Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control  
Program Line: **206-477-9333**  
[www.kingcounty.gov/weeds](http://www.kingcounty.gov/weeds)

## What You Can Do

The King County Noxious Weed Control Program is actively trying to stop the spread of meadow knapweed. Unfortunately, this plant is sometimes collected and even cultivated as an ornamental which has resulted in an even greater distribution in our area. Similar to other knapweeds, the seeds are easily spread by animals and humans. Do your part by checking for this plant on your property and cleaning vehicles and recreational gear if you have traveled to an area known to be infested with knapweeds. If you see this plant, please call our office. By stopping seed production and eliminating existing plants, infestations will decline or be eliminated over time.

## Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons.

**Manual:** Isolated small populations can be dug out by hand using a shovel or stout trowel, making sure to remove as much root as possible. Sites where plants have been removed need to be watched closely for new growth as disturbed soil aids in germination of any seeds present and plants can resprout from rootstock left in the ground. Replant with ground cover, grass or other desirable plants.

**Mechanical:** Repeated mowing may suppress the plants' ability to produce seed, but in some cases it will only lower the blooming height. Tilling and cultivation that buries seeds and plant matter below a depth of one and half inches can be effective, especially if the area is replanted with a healthy cover crop.

**Chemical:** Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. **Certain herbicides cannot be used in aquatic areas or their buffers.** Check the label for any site-specific restrictions. 2,4-D and triclopyr are effective at time of stem elongation (usually late April to early May) before flowers open. These products are selective for broadleaf plants and will not harm

grasses that help suppress new knapweed seedlings. Glyphosate (e.g. Roundup) is also effective but will kill grasses as well. When using glyphosate, follow by seeding or planting with appropriate species. Apply glyphosate when most plants are at bud stage. Apply herbicide to the entire leaf and stem surface of actively growing plants; do not cut the stem after applying the herbicide since this will stop the plant from absorbing the chemical.



Spotted



Bighead



Diffuse

### Other Knapweeds:

Several other invasive knapweeds are found in King County. Three of the more common ones are **Diffuse** (*Centaurea diffusa*), **Bighead** (*Centaurea macrocephala*) and **Spotted** (*Centaurea stoebe*). All of these share many of the same traits as meadow knapweed and all have the same negative impacts on the landscape: they crowd out native vegetation and impair the quality of wildlife habitat and pastures.

An area of heavy seedling infestation can be efficiently controlled by an herbicide application in spring, followed by an application later in the summer if needed.