

Overview

Knapweeds are aggressive, invasive noxious weeds of pastures, cultivated fields, travel corridors, and bare ground.

They increase soil erosion and crowd out native vegetation by consuming soil nutrients. Weed scientists have attributed the success of some knapweeds to their ability to release chemicals into the soil that eliminates competition by killing neighboring plants. This enables these weeds to quickly and effectively take over an area once introduced.

Knapweed infestations are noted to increase production costs for ranchers, decrease the quality of wildlife habitat, reduce plant diversity, degrade recreational and wilderness lands, and pose fire hazards. These species have little value as forage for cattle and game, and yellow starthistle can cause chewing disease in horses when eaten.

Dispersal Mechanisms

Knapweeds are easily moved by animals and birds that may pick up the weed seeds and disperse them. Wind and water can also move knapweed seeds, though the biggest contributors to the movement of weed seeds are humans. We transport them on our vehicles, on clothes, on recreational gear and equipment, and on farm and other heavy equipment.

Management

Timing is key for effective control of knapweeds, and early detection and rapid response can stop the weeds from establishing. For best results, use a combination of methods to control knapweeds including mechanical, chemical, cultural, and biological control. You should do a site specific evaluation to determine which control tactics will work the best for your land. For more information on control, consult your county weed control board, county extension office, conservation district, or the Pacific Northwest Weed Control Handbook.

**The best knapweed control is prevention!
You must correctly identify the plant to keep an
infestation from becoming established.**

For more information on weeds in Washington contact:

Washington State
Noxious Weed Control Board
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, WA 98504
(360) 725-5764

<http://www.nwcb.wa.gov>

Or

Washington State Department of Agriculture
21 North First Avenue #103
Yakima, WA 98902
(509) 249-6973

Or

Your local County Noxious Weed Control Board:

You Can Help Protect Washington's Environment from Noxious Weeds!

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Knapweed artwork taken from PNW 432

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SELECTED KNAPWEEDS OF WASHINGTON



Information and Identification

Bighead



Black



Diffuse



Meadow



Russian



Spotted



Brown



Yellow Starthistle



Knapweeds	Growth Habit	Leaves	Root System	Flower	Bracts	Taken from PNW 432
Bighead <i>Centaurea macrocephala</i>	Upright, stems unbranched; perennial	Light-green, broadly lance shaped with toothed edges and pointed tips	Woody taproot	Solitary in a large globe-shaped head; yellow	Thin and papery with fringed margins	
Black <i>Cenaturea nigra</i>	Upright, stems are few and branch near the middle; perennial from a woody root crown	Green-gray, broadly lance-shaped leaves on a stalk	Woody taproot	Rose to lavender	Covered with a “comb-like”, dark brown or black fringed margins up to 3x as long as the bract	
Diffuse <i>Centaurea diffusa</i>	Upright; stems branch profusely; annual or short-lived perennial	Silvery-green; lower leaves are divided, upper leaves are narrow and elliptical	Taproot	White, rose, or purple	Covered with “comb-like” spines	
Meadow <i>Centaurea Jacea x nigra</i>	Upright; perennial growing from a woody root crown	Deep-green leaves are lance-shaped and stalkless; basal leaves taper at both ends, upper leaves are smaller and not lobed	Woody to fleshy taproot	Solitary, globe-shaped heads; rose to purple	Fringes gold to dark brown, about the width of the bract and rounded at the tip	
Russian <i>Acroptilon repens</i>	Upright; hardy, long-lived, perennial spreading by creeping roots and seeds	Silvery-green; lower leaves long and lobed, upper leaves are smaller and toothed	Horizontal, brown to black in color	Pink to purple	Pearly and papery, with no noticeable fringes or spines	
Spotted <i>Centaurea stoebe</i>	Upright; biennial or short-lived perennial; rosette will form in the first year followed by stalks in the second	Medium-green with a silvery-gray cast; deeply lobed on young plants becoming elliptical with maturity	Stout taproot	Solitary; purple, pink or sometimes white	Fringed tips dark and short	
Brown <i>Centaurea jacea</i>	Upright, stems branch near the top; perennial	Lance-shaped, undivided; leaves grow progressively smaller towards the top	Woody taproot	Rose to purple	Tips are wider than bask and the thin, papery margins have a dark brown center	
Yellow starthistle <i>Centaurea solstitialis</i>	Upright, stems branch and are ridged; winter annual forming a rosette early and then growing upright	Grayish-green; lower leaves are deeply lobed, upper leaves are smaller and pointed	Taproot	Single, terminal; bright yellow	Modified into stiff spines up to ¾” long	