

CANADA THISTLE

Cirsium arvense (L.) Scop.

Prohibited - Control

Common Names

Creeping Thistle, California Thistle, Corn Thistle

Life Cycle

Herbaceous perennial

Native Range

Europe

Look-a-Likes

[Alfalfa \(pg 60\)](#)

[Knapweeds \(pg 101\)](#)

[Musk Thistle \(pg 68\)](#)

Native Thistles

[Plumeless Thistle \(pg 33\)](#)

[Swamp Thistle \(pg 97\)](#)

Habitat

A successful inhabitant of disturbed areas such as roadsides and old fields but will also move into open wood-lands and prairies.

This species is also found where water levels fluctuate such as in wet meadows, along stream banks and ditches.

Means of Spread

Spreads primarily by rhizomes and seeds. 80% of seed falls within 3 feet of the parent plant. Clonal stands are common and spread significant from roots that can grow horizontally 10 to 12 feet per year.



Identification

Plant - Herbaceous, perennial with grooved, non-spiny, hairy and typically upright stems to a height of 2 to 6 feet tall.

Leaves - Alternate, simple, pinnately lobed leaves that are generally lance-shaped. The leaves are irregularly lobed, with toothed, spiny edges. The leaves are stalkless (sessile) and at maturity are downy or hairy on the underside.

Flower - Male and female (dioecious) $\frac{3}{4}$ inch flowers occur singly on the end of branches. The disk or composite inflorescence is comprised of many purple to pinkish (may also be white) small florets. Bracts below the inflorescence do not have spines on the tips.

Bloom Time - June to October

Seed and Fruit - Tufted, oblong, light brown seeds can be dispersed by wind.

Root - Develops a widespread root and rhizome system quickly taking over an area.

Management

Mechanical - Cutting or mowing should target plants that are approximately 3 inches tall and the process must be repeated throughout the season to maintain the plants at 3 inches or less in height. Continuing this approach for several years can drain the plants of reserves.

Chemical - Foliar applications should be made as the plants bolt, prior to flower set, or in late summer/early autumn to rosettes.

Fire - Repeated prescribed fire can be used to encourage stands of native grasses that will outcompete thistle. However, monitoring is needed to check for thistle that germinates in bare soil soon after burns are completed.



Treatment Timing



Canada Thistle

Effective herbicide formulations: aminopyralid, clopyralid, metsulfuron.