

## Canada Thistle *Cirsium Arvense*

by Lisa Marie Gee

The Canada thistle is native to eastern and northern Europe and western Asia. It was introduced to North America in the 1600's as a contaminant in agricultural seed and has since spread throughout the United States and Canada. It grows in rangeland pastures, agricultural fields, and natural areas and thrives in disturbed habitats. It is a noxious weed in 33 states as it is an aggressive competitor for light, nutrients and moisture. Infestations in agricultural fields can reduce crop yield, in

pastures and rangelands it can reduce its value and in natural areas can displace native plants.

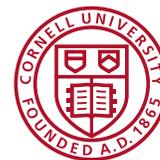
Canada thistle is an erect herbaceous perennial with an extensive creeping rootstock which can extend ten feet below the soil. The tap root is capable of sending out lateral roots which new sprouts can come up from. Plants can also regenerate from small root fragments which can survive for over 100 days in the soil. A rosette develops early in the season and elongates as day length increases in the early summer. The leaves are irregularly lobed with spiny, toothed margins. Rose-purple or sometimes white flower heads appear in terminal clusters from June through October. Canada thistle is dioecious, with individual plants producing only male or female flowers. Female plants can produce up to 5,000 seeds per stem. The seeded fruits are 1-inch long and have a feathery structure attached to the seed base. The seeds are easily dispersed by the wind and can remain viable in the soil for up to twenty years.

Management of Canada thistle can take some time and persistence. There are several

biological control agents such as the Canada thistle stem weevil and Canada thistle gall but there is little evidence of them having much of an impact. For light infestations, black plastic can be used to smother it. Repeated and frequent pulling or hand-cutting will eventually starve underground stems but should be done at least three times each season. Mowing does not kill Canada thistle unless it is repeated monthly for up to four years. Late spring burns, between May and June, are detrimental to this invasive. Targeted applications of systemic herbicides work well, but always read the label and follow directions for application. Herbicide treatments are best done when plants are in the rosette stage. Repeated applications of the herbicide are usually necessary.



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