

CANADA THISTLE

CANADA THISTLE (*Cirsium arvense*)



APPEARANCE:

A creeping perennial that can grow 1 to 5 feet tall. Numerous flower heads are small and urn-shaped. Flowers are normally pink, but can be white to purple. Leaves are spiny with the underside often appearing white.

HABITAT:

A native of Eurasia, it was brought into Canada in contaminated crop seed. It is found almost anywhere and it prefers rich, moist soils.

SEASON: Flowering occurs June through August. New plants grow from wind blown seed or from roots. Roots grow under the soil surface producing shoots that make new plants. Not all Canada thistle flowers produce seed. In fact, male and female flowers are usually on separate plants but both flowers will produce white plumes that blow through-out the countryside in the summer. Only plumes from pollinated female flowers will contain seeds. Seeds may germinate immediately, or remain in the soil until environmental conditions are favorable.



HOW DOES IT SPREAD? It reproduces both by seed and also by extensive horizontal creeping rhizomes in its root system that send up new shoots.

CONTROL: See the reverse side for information on mechanical, cultural, biological and chemical control of Canada Thistle. Also see our Chemical Treatment handout for additional information on herbicide use.



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How to Control Canada Thistle

Canada Thistle is a perennial that reproduces not only by seed but also vegetatively through its roots. Control is by preventing seed production and killing the root system.

Mechanical Mowing can prevent seed production, and regular repeated mowing at least every three weeks throughout several growing seasons can eventually starve nutrients from the roots. However, most mechanical methods such as tillage that break up the root system actually increase Canada Thistle infestations.

Cultural The best long term weed control is to get your desirable native plants thriving. Killing weeds is only one step, you have to also replace them with something good. Seed and fertilize so your grass can take nutrients away from the weeds and not leave available open soil for new weeds to germinate.

Biological There are three insects released for biological control of Canada Thistle, but none have made any significant impact.

Chemical *Chemical treatment of creeping perennials must target the root system in order to be effective. Killing only the top growth with an herbicide such as 2,4-D will not reduce your infestation. See our Chemical Treatment handout for more information.

- **Aminopyralid** is the active ingredient in herbicide products such as **Milestone**. It is broadleaf selective (safe on grasses) and persists a long time in the soil. It is one of the most effective herbicides for Canada Thistle. Apply it once all plants have emerged, up until they begin to flower. Application may need to be repeated 1-2 additional years.
- **Clopyralid** is the active ingredient in herbicide products such as **Transline**. It is broadleaf selective and also safe on most conifer trees. It gives good control of Canada Thistle when applied during the rosette stage. Retreatment may be necessary 2-3 additional years.
- **Chlorsulfuron** is the active ingredient in herbicide products such as **Telar XP**. It is a dry chemical that must be mixed into water and agitated. It is broadleaf selective and effective on Canada Thistle if applied during bolting and early flowering stages.