

CANADA THISTLE

Cirsium arvense



Canada Thistle (CT)

Canada thistle is a Pennsylvania state listed noxious weed with nationwide distribution, though it is most problematic in the northern states. Canada thistle is capable of forming a monoculture in all habitats, displacing native or beneficial plants. It significantly reduces crop yields, pasture productivity, interferes with harvesting, and is a host for some crop-damaging insects.

History

Despite its name, this thistle is native to Eurasia and does not originate from Canada. As early as the 1500's A.D., Canada thistle was a known troublesome weed in southern Europe. It is believed that in the early 1600's, Canada thistle was introduced to North America via French settlers. It was most likely a contaminant of farm seed or wool.

Canada thistle was not reported west of the Allegheny Mountains until after 1835. Unfortunately, by 1896, it's occurrence in 21 of 25 states prompted weed legislations pertaining to Canada thistle. Today, Canada thistle is present throughout most of the United States being absent in only 8 states. Thirty-four states have the plant listed as a noxious weed.

Canada Thistle in Pennsylvania

In the early 1800's, botanists believed Canada thistle was either rare or had not yet made it to the state. The earliest reported observation of the plant in PA was made in 1828 in Chester county, where it appeared to have been introduced among Timothy seeds.

Pennsylvania has had legislation ordering the control of Canada thistle dating back to 1862 (P.L. 164 no. 164). This act was "an act to provide for the destruction, and to prevent the spread of Canada thistles" and other weeds. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture included Canada thistle in the PA Noxious Weed Control Act in 1982 declaring it a state noxious weed.

Canada thistle is widespread in PA and is probably present in every municipality in the Commonwealth if not every tract of land. It is a common weed of cropland, idle land, lawns, gardens and roadsides.

Canada Thistle Program

There is no state regulatory assistance program for Canada thistle. Because of its ability to take over cropland, lawns and gardens and the injury the spines cause animals and humans, it is the number one **Noxious Weed Complaint** that the Department of Agriculture processes on an annual basis. The Secretary of Agriculture may issue a **Noxious Weed Control Order** to an individual landowner requiring they implement measures to prevent thistle seeds from blowing or to prevent rhizomes from spreading onto another's property.

How You Can Help

All properties owners should manage Canada thistle infestations to prevent this widespread and common noxious weed from taking over their property. Total eradication is difficult but possible and there are several herbicides that will kill thistle species in crops as well as non-cropland. Mowing management is also effective.





Steve Dewey <http://www.invasive.org>

Canada thistle flower colors range from white to pink to purple.



www.saskatoon.ca

Fruiting head: It is too late in the growing season to control thistles once they reach this stage of maturity.



Public domain

Canada thistle rhizomes are interconnected and help thistles spread quickly and will resprout when fragmented by tillage equipment or weeding.

Canada Thistle Description

Canada thistle is a rhizomatous perennial member of the family Asteraceae commonly called the aster family. Plants can range in height from 1.5 ft to 5 ft.

Leaves are alternative and oblong to lanceolate. They are usually irregularly lobed with protruding sharp, spiny margins. The underside of the leaves are usually lighter in color than the upper side.

Stems are grooved, erect and can be slightly hairy.

Flowers emerge on an inflorescence and sit atop a oval shaped structure called an involucre: small overlapping bracts supporting the flower itself.

The **disk flowers** are comprised of a **one seeded fruit** that has bristles called a **pappus** at the terminal end. It is these parts of the plant that create the fluffy white snow-storm of seeds in the summer.

The pappus colors "flowers" vary from pink to purple and sometimes white. Flowering begins in early June and continues through September and seeds are then wind dispersed.

Roots are creeping and form an extensive underground rhizome system. They can travel as deep as 3 feet below the surface. The rhizome allow Canada thistle to form large colonies from a single parent plant.



Canada thistle Leaf

Similar species

Within our range there are 16 species of *Cirsium* and several are native thistles. Non are as common in waste ground and/or agricultural ground as

this noxious weed. Non-thistles, such as prickly lettuce and sow-thistle are two other weed species that look similar but contain milky white sap.

Biology/ Ecology



An uncontrolled canada thistle infestation (pink)

UGA1459759

Canada thistle spreads rapidly in the soil because of deep, creeping roots which will give rise to aerial shoots. It is a long day plant requiring

14 to 16 hours of sunlight for flowering to be induced. This is why from year to year the instances of "snowing", "blowing" thistle differs each year.



Canada thistle seedling

5362875

Canada thistle grows in a wide range of habitats from wet to moist grasslands, floodplains, roadsides, pastures, and

drainage ditches. Plants spread by both wind blown seeds and by fragment rhizomes that adhere to tillage equipment or are spread in flood waters.