



Russian Knapweed



flower



leaves



bracts

Russian Knapweed

Genus: *Acroptilon*

Species: *repens*

Priority Listing: 2B

Perennial

Russian knapweed is native to Eurasia and was likely introduced into North America as a contaminant in alfalfa around 1898. Russian knapweed typically **inhabits** roadsides, pastures, croplands, clear-cuts, irrigation ditches, riverbanks and other areas that have been disturbed.

Russian knapweed has an extensive **rhizomatous** root system that creates dense colonies. The roots of this plant are easily recognizable because they are woody, have a bark like texture, and have buds that form along the roots that develop into shoots.

Russian knapweed is **allelopathic**, meaning that it produces chemicals that act as a natural **herbicide** to surrounding plants. This gives Russian knapweed a strong competitive advantage.

The stem and leaves of the Russian knapweed are grey-green in color because they are covered with fine white hairs. The leaves are alternate and leaves that occur toward the bottom of the plant are **lanceolate** and are deeply lobed. Leaves that occur

on the upper portion of the plant are smaller, oblong and toothed.

Flowers of this plant are pink-purple and bloom from June to September. The bracts of Russian knapweed are papery smooth and broad with rounded tips while the inner **bracts** are more narrow and hairy.

Russian knapweed seeds are called achenes. **Achenes** are white and slightly ridged; each achene has a featherlike structure called a pappus which has bristles. This **pappus** is used for transportation by the wind and falls off as the seed reaches maturity. Every year a single Russian knapweed plant can produce up to 1,200 seeds.

Remember that Russian knapweed can spread through both root shoots and seeds, so be careful not to move any soil from an infested area to an uninfested area.



Seed head photo courtesy of Matt Lavin, via Flickr

Achene: small one seeded fruits, can be like a sunflower seed or one of the dandelion seeds

Allelopathic: the inhibition of growth in one species of plants by chemicals produced by another species

Bracts: a modified leaf that often wraps the base of a flower, these leaves vary in shape and size from the plant's other leaves

Herbicide: a chemical substance used to kill or destroy plants, likely to be used on weeds

Inhabits: to live in, reside in, or be present in

Lanceolate: tapering from a rounded base toward an apex; lance-shaped

Pappus: a group of flower sepals which have feather or hair-like qualities, like a dandelion seed

Perennial: a plant whose life spans several years

Rhizomes: a perennial underground stem that usually grows horizontally