



Canada Thistle



flower



leaves



seeds

Canada Thistle

Genus: *Cirsium*

Species: *arvense*

Priority Listing: 2B

Biological control agents:

Canada thistle stem weevil, Canada thistle stem gall fly

Canada thistle is native to the Mediterranean, southeast Europe and Asia; it was first introduced to the United States by accident in the early 1600's.

Horizontal roots of Canada thistle can extend up to 15' or more and vertical roots can reach a depth from 6 to 15'.

Seedlings of Canada thistle can reproduce from their root systems at 7 to 8 weeks after **germination**. **Rosettes** of the young plant emerge from its root system in April through May. Canada thistle can also form new plants from the buds on its roots.

Canada thistle likes disturbed ground such as ditch banks, overgrazed pastures, abandoned sites, and tilled fields. An infestation of Canada thistle decreases productivity in pastureland because many grazing animals avoid grazing infested areas.

Canada thistle can be identified by its erect stems 1 ½' to 4' tall with prickly leaves. Stems are branched, ridged

and can be slightly hairy. The leaves are **lanceolate**, irregularly lobed, spiny and have toothed margins.

Flower heads are pink to purple (rarely white) and bloom from June to October. Each flower head has 85 to 132 little flowers called **florets**. Each floret makes one seed! Canada thistle flower heads are ¾" wide, much smaller than biennial thistles, and they occur in rounded, **umbel** shaped clusters.

Canada thistle produces single-seeded fruits called **achenes** that are 1/8" long and have a feathery structure called a **pappus** attached to the seed top. Achenes do not travel far in the wind, but they can float long distances in water currents. Achenes are able to germinate within 8 to 10 days after pollination.

Canada thistle can be controlled by various **integrated weed management techniques**. Recently, researchers discovered that cows, bison and sheep can be trained to eat Canada thistle!

Achenes: small one seeded fruits, can be like a sunflower seed or a dandelion seed

Biennial: a plant that lives two years, usually flowering in the second year

Biological Control Method: a method of controlling pests (including insects, mites, weeds and plant diseases) using other living organisms

Florets: a very small flower, may be single or grow in clusters

Germination: the process by which plants, fungi and bacteria emerge from seeds and spores, and begin growth

Integrated Weed Management Techniques: the combination of multiple management tools to reduce a pest population to an acceptable level while preserving the quality of existing habitat, water, and other natural resources

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

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

Perennial: a plant whose life spans several years

Rosettes: circular clusters of leaves that radiate from a center of a plant, close to the ground, like the dandelion

Umbel: flat-topped or rounded flower cluster where the individual flower stalks arise from about the same point, creating a flower shape somewhat like an umbrella