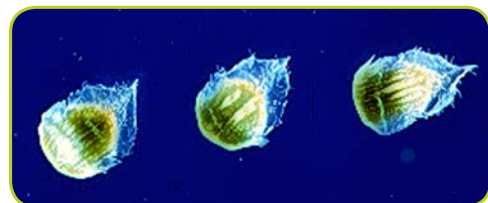


# RUSSIAN KNAPWEED

[*Acroptilon repens* (L.) DC.] syn. (*Centaurea repens* L.)



# RUSSIAN KNAPWEED

State Noxious Weed List: **Yes.**

Russian knapweed is the most widespread of the knapweeds in North Dakota. It also is the only perennial of the noxious knapweeds and is the most difficult to control. Russian knapweed often is found in poorly drained and saline/alkaline soils with supplemental water sources such as rivers and streams. This persistent weed often is found in southwestern North Dakota, but increasingly infestations have been found statewide. Russian knapweed grows especially well in areas with supplemental water sources such as the Little Missouri and Heart rivers in North Dakota.

Identification and growth form:

Russian knapweed is a long-lived, deep-rooted perennial with growth characteristics similar to Canada thistle. The weed emerges in the spring from roots and grows to 2 to 3 feet tall and is shrublike with spreading branches. Once established, Russian knapweed spreads mainly by underground root stocks as seed production is limited compared with other knapweed species. The leaves are alternate and lobed lower on the plant while upper leaves are entire. Flowering occurs from June to September and flowers vary from light pink to lavender. The stems die back to the soil surface each year.

Two key characteristics distinguish Russian knapweed from spotted and diffuse knapweed. First, the flowers have rounded bracts with transparent tips that are quite different in appearance than the dark bracts of spotted and diffuse knapweed. Second, the root of this perennial is dark brown to black, scaly as if the plant had been burned, and can grow to depths of greater than 20 feet. The flowers of Russian knapweed vary from light pink to lavender.

Why is this plant a concern?

Russian knapweed can spread rapidly and is very competitive with native species. Russian knapweed will reduce forage production to near zero as the site often becomes a monoculture. Russian knapweed also will infest roadsides, pasture and rangeland and is the only knapweed in the state that causes significant losses in cropland.

How do I control this plant?

Russian knapweed is one of the most difficult perennial weeds to control. If the plant is found in cropland, then a combination of cultivation and herbicide treatments will suppress the plant. However, herbicides at labeled rates for cropland use will not control Russian knapweed.

**Chemical.** Tordon (picloram) is one of the most effective herbicides used for Russian knapweed control. The best control is obtained when picloram is applied following several hard frosts (mid-October). Russian knapweed plants may be dormant with gray stems and no leaves, but control the following spring is nearly 100 percent. Application in mid-September or during flowering in midsummer provides shorter-term control than late applications. Other herbicides used for Russian knapweed control include Escort (metsulfuron) and Milestone (aminopyralid).

**Cultural.** Livestock generally will not graze Russian knapweed. Mowing and cultivation do not control this weed.

**Biological.** Exploration and evaluation of biocontrol agents for Russian knapweed are in progress. The gall fly *Jaapiella ivannikovi* was approved for release in 2009 has established and shows promise for the reduction of Russian knapweed. This insect may soon be available for wider distribution.