

WAVYLEAF THISTLE

[*Cirsium undulatum* (Nutt.) Spreng.]



WAVYLEAF THISTLE

State Noxious Weed List: **No.**

Wavyleaf thistle is a native species and is common in western North Dakota. Various Native American tribes used wavyleaf thistle to treat gonorrhea and syphilis. The remedy involved drinking a tea made from the plant and then elevating the body temperature to induce sweating. A tea also was made from the roots to treat diabetes and stomachache. The roots were boiled and used in soup.

Identification and growth form:

Wavyleaf thistle is a perennial native plant that often is confused with Flodman thistle. Wavyleaf thistle tends to flower from July to September, often a week or two earlier than Flodman thistle. Wavyleaf thistle tends to be more spiny and the leaves less deeply lobed than Flodman thistle. Also, wavyleaf thistle is found in well-drained soils, generally in drier locations than those occupied by Flodman thistle. Wavyleaf thistle grows 3 to 4 feet tall and often is associated with sagebrush communities and rangeland but is less common in moist meadows.

The leaves of wavyleaf are alternate and tipped with yellow spines. The leaves are very pubescent, giving the plant a gray cast, and are less deeply lobed than Flodman thistle. Leaves are strongly undulated or wavy, which gives the plant its common name. The stem of wavyleaf thistle is very pubescent and generally thicker than Flodman thistle. Rosette leaves are also very wavy and gray in appearance.

The flowers are most often pink or purple, but there is a white-flowered form, *f. album* Farwell. The flowers are usually more than 2 inches in diameter, with globe-shaped heads. The yellow spines on the heads lack the sticky secretion found on Flodman thistle. The achenes are brown without a lighter apical band or with only a very narrow lighter margin.

Wavyleaf thistle is a larger plant than Flodman thistle. Generally Flodman thistle is more common than wavyleaf in eastern North Dakota, but wavyleaf gradually becomes the predominant species in the central and western portions of the state.

Why is this plant a concern?

Generally wavyleaf thistle is kept in check by native insects and birds that feed on the plant as well as native pathogens that reduce plant vigor and growth. Wavyleaf has become a problem when the plant spreads beyond its normal range, such as the Pacific coast. Otherwise this plant does not warrant control efforts.