

Bull thistle



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[*Cirsium vulgare* (Savi) Tenore]

Bull thistle is a biennial and is the least serious of the introduced thistles in North Dakota. The plant forms a large (1 to 2 feet) rosette the first year and bolts to 5 or more feet the following season. Plants are multi-branched with purple veined stems and are winged. Bull thistle is most easily distinguished by the leaves which are deeply toothed and toothed again (double dentate) with prominent stiff spines. The leaves have a distinct center vein with prickly hairs above and cottony pubescence below. Bull thistle flowers are 2 to 3 inches tall, usually singular at the end of each stem and gum dropped shaped with long, stiff, yellow-tipped spines. The flowers are generally purple and rarely white.

Bull thistle generally is found growing singularly or in small patches. The large size and showy flowers makes the plant quite noticeable, but bull thistle has little economic or ecological importance. Many plant parts from the root to the flower can be eaten. Flower petals can be used as chewing gum.

