

Canada thistle



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[*Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop.]

Canada thistle has become the most wide spread invasive weed in North Dakota and infests crop and wildlands. Canada thistle is a long-lived perennial with an extensive root system that can grow laterally 12 to 15 feet per year. Root buds occur randomly and initiate new shoots whenever conditions are favorable. The plant begins growth from the roots in late spring and usually bolts in June to a height of 3 or more feet. The leaves are oblong, usually deeply cut and have spiny-toothed edges. Canada thistle has small (0.75 inch diameter) flower heads that appear on the upper stems in midsummer. Flower color ranges from purple to rose and sometimes white. Male and female flowers are produced on different plants. Seeds mature rapidly and can germinate eight to 10 days after pollination. Canada thistle is adapted to a wide range of environmental conditions.

Canada thistle was listed in 1885 by Dakota Territory as “required of every person to destroy this weed.” Canada thistle biocontrol agents generally have not been effective when used alone.

