

Canada thistle (*Cirsium (Breaa) arvense*)



Recognition:

Small flowers (much smaller than musk thistle), with many flowers per stem. Flowers are light purple. Leaves have spine-tipped lobes. Plant is 1-4 feet tall.

Biology:

An aggressive creeping perennial that will come back every year, spreading by roots and seeds.

Control:

The key to Canada thistle control is to stress the plant and force it to exhaust root nutrient stores. Combining control methods is the best.:

Mowing or pulling alone is not effective unless conducted at one-month intervals over several years. Even then, it might not be enough.

Spray systemic herbicide in the fall after pulling or mowing earlier in the season.

Do not allow the plant to go to seed. Bag any flowers/seed heads so they don't spread.

Why thistles are a problem

- They take over native vegetation, crowding out our beautiful wildflowers.
- Aggressive weedy thistles take years to control.
- They reduce habitat for wildlife.
- Large stands reduce property values.
- They are very prickly.
- State Law requires that thistles be controlled on your property.

Caution! Not all thistles are noxious—please see reverse side of this flyer for native thistles, which are important players in our ecosystem.

Musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*)



Musk thistle Recognition:

Large purple flowers (much larger than Canada thistle). There is only one flower per stem.

Musk thistle rosette



The first year of growth is just leaves (called a rosette). The leaves are edged with white, and are prickly. The second year, it sends up the flowers. It is often mistakenly called Russian thistle in Gilpin county.

Biology:

Musk thistle is a biennial, meaning that it goes from seed to flower over two years, and then the plant will die. It only spreads by seed.

Control:

The key to control is to kill the plant before it goes to seed.

Pull, dig, or spray before you see any purple.

If you pull the plant when the flowers are showing purple, bag the flower heads to prevent spreading seed. The rest of the plant does not need to be bagged because it won't re-root.

There will be seeds in the soil that will come up for a few years. Once the soil seed bank is depleted, there will be no more musk thistle. Be persistent!

Not all thistles are noxious!

There are 20 native thistle species in Colorado, and these play an important role for wildlife. Native thistles should not be eradicated, because they are not noxious weeds.

How do you tell a native thistle from a noxious thistle?

If the stand of thistles is very dense or very tall (6 ft), it is usually noxious.

Above timberline, thistles are probably native.

Native thistles tend to be short, and found as individual plants or in very small groups of 2-4 plants.

A thistle with a white flower (the FLOWER, not the fluffy dandelion-like seeds), is probably native.



American thistle—*Cirsium centaurae*

Wavy leaf thistle—*Cirsium undulatum*



Native thistles in Gilpin County



Elk thistle—*Cirsium scariosum*



Creamy thistle
Cirsium canescens

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Thistles in Gilpin County



Canada thistle—noxious weed



Musk thistle –noxious weed



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