

Canada thistle
(*Cirsium arvense*)

Currently in Montana, noxious weed infest about 8.2 million acres. Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast, or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state listed noxious weed list.

Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is a perennial plant, native to the Mediterranean, southeast Europe and Asia; it was first introduced to the United States by accident in the early 1600's. Horizontal roots of Canada thistle can extend up to 15' or more and vertical roots can reach depths of 6 to 15'. Seedlings of Canada thistle can reproduce from their root systems at 7 to 8 weeks after germination. Rosettes of the young plant emerge from its root system in April through May. Canada thistle can also form new plants from the buds on its roots. Canada thistle likes disturbed ground such as ditch banks, overgrazed pastures, abandoned sites, and tilled fields. An infestation of Canada thistle decreases productivity in pastureland because many animals avoid grazing infested areas. Canada thistle can be identified by its erect stems that can grow up to 4' tall with prickly leaves. Stems are branched, ridged and can be slightly hairy. The leaves are lanceolate, irregularly lobed, spiny and have toothed margins. Flower heads are pink to purple (rarely white) and bloom from June to October. Each flower head has 85 to 132 little flowers called florets. Each floret makes one seed! Canada thistle flower heads are much smaller than biennial thistles, and they occur in rounded, umbel shaped clusters. Canada thistle produces single-seeded fruits called achenes that have a feathery structure called a pappus attached to the seed top. Achenes do not travel far in the wind, but they can float long distances in water currents. Achenes are able to germinate within 8 to 10 days after pollination. Canada thistle can be controlled by various integrated weed management techniques. Recently, researchers discovered that cows, bison and sheep can be trained to eat Canada thistle!

Please take a few moments to learn about noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-5600.