

Bull thistle

Cirsium vulgare

Description

This species is listed as a prohibited noxious weed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Habit

Biennial and sometimes annual or monocarpic perennial; Juvenile phase produce a single rosette with a taproot up to 28 in long, rosettes may develop up to 3.3 ft in diameter. Taproots do not spread but develops several smaller lateral roots.

Leaves

More or less lance-shaped and 3-12 in long, prickly hairy on the top and very hairy underneath. Lobes are tipped with stout spines.

Stems

Upright, covered with spiny wings and grow 1-6.6



ft tall with many spreading branches, and sometimes a single stem.

Flowers

1.5-2 in in diameter, 1-2 in long, usually solitary, and more or less clustered at the ends of shoots and branches, subtended by narrow, spine-tipped bracts; blooms June through October.

Fruits and Seeds

Fruits are achenes, 1/16 in long with a long, hairy plume that is easily detached.

Habitat

Native to Europe, western Asia and northern Africa. Found in pastures, overgrazed rangelands, recently burned forests, forest clear-cuts, and along roads, ditches, and fences.

Reproduction

By seed. Bull thistle typically produces 100 to 300 seeds per flower and can have over 400 flowers per plant; may require cross-fertilization to produce fertile seed.

Similar

Swamp Thistle (*Cirsium muticum*), Field Thistle (*Cirsium discolor*) do not have spiny, winged stems. European swamp thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) has spiny winged stems but its flowers are much smaller at 1.5 cm (0.8 in) or less in diameter.

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Mow to prevent seeding; effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use

herbicides such as glyphosate, triclopr, or dicamba; natural enemies include the seed-feeding fly, *Urophora stylata* Fabricius.

Credits

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