

Diffuse knapweed

Centaurea diffusa

Description

Introduced in the early 1900s as a contaminant of alfalfa seed.

Habit

Short lived perennial, annual or monocarpic perennial with a long fibrous taproot.

Leaves

Finely divided and alternate. May have a gray appearance due to tiny fine hairs.

Stems

Single, upright stem with many branches, growing up to 40 inches tall. Stems break at ground level, resulting in increased seed dispersal.

Flowers

Usually white in color, sometimes pinkish to purple and form at the tip of branches. Bracts contain multiple lateral spines and one prominent terminal spine.





Fruits and Seeds

Seed heads are urn-shaped, with many seeds compact in the flower head. Nodding flower head gives the plant its mobility, turning into "tumbleweed" when flowering stalks break off facilitating seed transport over long distances. Plants can produce over a thousand seeds per plant. Seeds do not have pappus, the parachute-like structure that aids in dispersal.

Habitat

Native to Eurasia. Found in open grasslands, prairies, open forests, orchards, and disturbed areas such as ditches, cultivated fields and field edges. Also commonly found near water sources.

Reproduction

By seed.

Similar

Other species of knapweed (Centaurea).

Monitoring and Rapid Response

For smaller infestations, hand pulling can be effective, removing as much of the tap root as possible. Mowing during flower stage is effective in preventing seed production. Tilling at a depth of 7 inches followed by dense reseeding of native species can help prevent reinvasion. Prescribed fire alone is not effective. Herbicide treatments most effective when combined with other control techniques.

Credits

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