

## Canada thistle

### *Cirsium arvense*

#### Description

This species is listed under <https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/plant-pest/plant-health-certification-and-export/seed> as a prohibited noxious weed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. Canada thistle was introduced to North America from Europe in the early 1600s.

#### Habit

Perennial, rhizomatous thistle ranging in height from 0.6-1.5 m (2-5 ft), forms large monocultures.

#### Leaves

Simple, alternate, lance-shaped, crinkly, tapering, irregular lobes and spiny toothed margins.

#### Stems

Upright; slender and branching towards the top; becoming increasingly hairy with age.

#### Flowers





Numerous, purple-lavender in color, small flower heads, less than 2.5 cm (1 in) high, clustered at the tops of stems, fragrant; bloom June through September.

### **Fruits and Seeds**

Seeds are small, light brown; tufts of hair attached to the tip for wind dispersal; one plant produces between 1500-5000 seeds, which can germinate 8-10 days after flowering begins and persist in the seed bank for up to 20 years.

### **Habitat**

Found in disturbed open areas, roadsides, agricultural fields; invades prairie and riparian areas; salt-tolerant; shade intolerant.

### **Reproduction**

Primarily by creeping, laterally spreading rhizomes, but also by prolific seed production; dioecious, with separate male and female clones; some hermaphroditic forms.

### **Similar**

Native swamp thistle (*Cirsium muticum*) has sticky flower heads; non-native weeds bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), European swamp thistle (*C. palustre*), and musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*) have spiny winged stems.

### **Monitoring and Rapid Response**

Monitor sunny, disturbed sites including degraded grasslands, open woodlands, edge habitats and restoration sites. Begin control efforts in highest quality areas; pull seedlings within 2.5 weeks after germination or they become perennial; Canada thistle is clonal; resprouts from root fragments. Herbicides are most effective with two applications per season: in spring, just before flowering, and in



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fall on new growth after mowing, treat all stems. Different strains of Canada thistle respond differently to the same herbicide; may require 5-10 years of ongoing efforts. This species is extremely difficult to eradicate - research control options thoroughly.

### **Credits**

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