



Canadian Thistle *Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop.

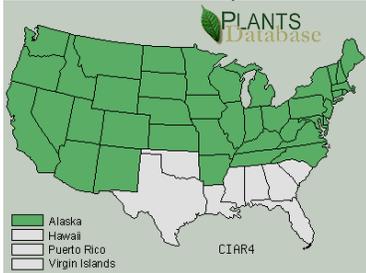
Common Names: Canadian thistle, creeping thistle and Californian thistle

Native Origin: Eurasia

Description: Canada thistle is an herbaceous perennial in the aster family (asteraceae) with erect stems 1½-4 feet tall, prickly leaves and an extensive creeping rootstock. Stems are branched, often slightly hairy, and ridged. Leaves are simple, lance-shaped, irregularly lobed with spiny, toothed margins and are borne singly and alternately along the stem. Fragrant, rose-purple to lavender, or sometimes white flower heads appear from June through October, and occur in rounded, umbrella-shaped clusters. Small light brown seeds break off easily, fall near parent plant, and are wind dispersed. One plant can produce 1,500 to 5,000 seeds that are capable of germinating eight to ten days after flowers open. Fibrous tap roots may extend 6 feet deep. Horizontal roots stemming from the tap roots produce new shoots. Canadian thistle reproduces mainly vegetatively but also from seed.



Habitat: It grows in barrens, glades, meadows, prairies, fields, pastures, and waste places. It does best in disturbed upland areas but also invades wet areas with fluctuating water levels such as stream bank sedge meadows and wet prairies. It can be found in clay to gravelly soils.



Distribution: This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is reported invasive in AK, AZ, CO, CT, DE, IA, ID, IN, MD, MI, MN, MO, MT, ND, NJ, OH, OR, PA, RI, SD, TN, VA, WA, WI, WV, and WY.

Ecological Impacts: Natural communities that are threatened by Canada thistle include non-forested plant communities such as prairies, barrens, savannas, glades, sand dunes, fields and meadows that have been impacted by disturbance. This highly invasive thistle prevents the coexistence of other plant species through shading, competition for soil resources and possibly

through the release of chemical toxins poisonous to other plants.

Control and Management:

Note-Canadian thistle is distinguished from all other thistles by 1) creeping horizontal lateral roots; 2) dense clonal growth; and 3) small dioecious (male and female flowers on separate plants) flower heads.



- **Manual-** Repeated mowing or selective cutting close to the ground can reduce infestations with three or four years. Cutting should be done at least 3 times per year. Note: mowing after flowering will only spread seed; clean mower if used in areas with plants in seed. Early spring burns may discourage however, may also encourage seed germination. Due to its perennial nature, entire plants must be killed in order to prevent re-growth from rootstock.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate. Follow label and state requirements.

• **Biocontrol:** At least 7 insect species have been released for Canada thistle control in North America.

References: <http://www.nps.gov>, <http://plants.usda.gov>, www.invasive.org, Czarapeta, Elizabeth J., *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest: An Illustrated Guide to their Identification and Control*, 2005. p. 55-57, <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/documnts/cirsarv.html>, *Invasive Plants of Asian Origin Established in the United States and their Natural Enemies*, USDA FS FHTET 2004-05, p. 51-54