

Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)

Description

A colony-forming, aggressive perennial, that spreads primarily by its creeping root system. Stems are grooved, upright, hollow and woody, branching near the top, and grow to 1.5 m tall. Leaves are lance-shaped, dark green, shiny on the surface and occur alternately, slightly clasping the stem. Lower leaves are largest and decrease in size upward along the



stems. Leaf edges can vary from smooth with no spines to irregularly lobed with sharp spines. Flowers form at the ends of stems in clusters of one to several. The flower head is urn-shaped and the bracts are spineless. The color of the flowers may vary from plant to plant, being purple, pink or white. Seeds are borne in an achene to 4 mm long which is tufted.

Key Identifiers

- ✓ Deep creeping roots
- ✓ Irregularly-lobed leaves with spines on margins only
- ✓ Male and female flowers on separate plants

Location in Canada

Canada Thistle has been reported in all Canadian provinces with the exception of Nunavut.

Resources

<http://www.invasiveplants.ab.ca/Downloads/FS-CanadaThistle.pdf>

[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/prm2585](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/prm2585)

Similar species

Cirsium spp - Marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*), Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), Wavy leaf thistle (*Cirsium undulatum*) - Canada thistle is distinguished from other *Cirsium spp* thistles by its deep-running perennial rootstocks, stems not conspicuously spiny-winged, and small compact dioecious flower heads.

Carduus spp - Nodding Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), Plumeless Thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*)
Wetted Thistle (*Carduus crispus*) flowers have spines or prickles and stems have winged appendages.

Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*)- covered with white woolly hairs and with the lower surface more densely covered than the upper. The leaves are deeply lobed with long, stiff spines along the margins. Fine hairs give the plant a greyish appearance.