



BULL THISTLE (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Family: Asteraceae (Aster)

Life Cycle: Biennial

Class: Weed of Concern - Control Recommended

AKA: Spear or Common thistle

BULL THISTLE

- Outcompetes native plants once established
- Spiny wings on stems
- Typically 2-3 ft. tall, but can grow up to 7 ft.
- Native to Europe

CONTROL METHODS

Mechanical: Hand pulling and digging can be effective on small infestations. Remove all roots or sever below the root crown.

Tilling effective if done before flowering.

Mowing effective if done just before flowering, and repeated throughout the season.

Cultural: Support desirable vegetation through nutrient and water management. Reseed disturbed areas to prevent invasion by bull thistle. Horses, sheep and goats may eat young plants, but avoid maturing foliage. Goats may eat flowerheads, reducing seed production.

Biological: Seed production is impacted by a seedhead gall fly. The larvae induce and feed on gall tissue in developing seedheads, which can reduce seed production by 60%. This insect is present in Washington.

Chemical*: Most effective on rosette stage. Use a surfactant. Recommendations are below.

DESCRIPTION

Growth Traits: Typically biennial, but may be annual or perennial, herbaceous plant. Rosettes up to three feet in diameter form in first year, bolting to flower in the second year. May grow three to seven feet tall with an upright branching stem.

Leaves and Stems: Leaves coarsely lobed and spine-tipped. Stem leaves alternate. Upper sides of leaves rough with coarse spiny hairs. Bottoms of leaves covered with wooly hairs. Stems have spiny wings extending down from leaf bases.

Flowers: Blooms June - September. Each plant has many flowerheads, typically one and a half to two inches in diameter. Bracts on flowers are spine-tipped. Flowers pink to purple, rarely white.

Roots and Reproduction: Taprooted. Reproduces by seed; each flowerhead may produce 100-300 seeds, and plants may have over 400 flowers in ideal conditions. Seeds are short lived on the soil surface, but seeds buried six inches or more may remain viable for three years. Seeds may be wind-dispersed.

Habitat: Bull thistle prefers sunny open sites and can tolerate a wide range of conditions. It will grow in disturbed areas such as rangeland, pasture, roadsides, logged areas, over grazed pasture and waste areas.

Toxicity: Not known to be toxic.

***ALWAYS read herbicide labels and follow instructions for use and PPE.** The use of a surfactant (aka sticker) increases the efficacy of herbicide application, saving you time and money. If treating over multiple seasons, rotate using herbicides with different modes of action to reduce likelihood of herbicide resistance developing. Below are recommended herbicides based on stage of growth and time of year. All recommendations are supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Noxious Weed Board is implied. Trade names are used to simplify recommendations.

NOTE: There is no 'magic bullet' in noxious weed control, and control efforts must be repeated every season to stop their spread. Using a combination of methods (e.g. cultural and chemical) will lead to better control over time.

April - May Rosette, Seedling Stage	June - July Bolting, Bud, Bloom Stage	August - October Seeding, Fall Regrowth Stage
2,4-D	Tordon + 2,4-D	Tordon + 2,4-D
Trimec	Trimec	Fall regrowth:
Prescott	Milestone	2,4-D
Milestone	Range Star	Prescott
Range Star		