

Bull Thistle

Cirsium vulgare

Description: Bull thistle is a biennial plant. The first year it forms as a rosette, and the adult form grows 3-6 feet high. The stem is hairy and branched with large thorns, and leaves are 3-6 inches long with hairs on the upper side and deeply lobed. Non-native thistles are much spiner than native thistles. Flowers are reddish-purple and 1 ½ to 2 inched across. Seeds have white fluff to help disperse them in the wind. They remain viable in the soil for 10 years.

Ecological Threat: Bull thistle invades disturbed sites such as pastures, roadsides, and ditches. In grazed pastures it has an advantage over native plants because grazers will avoid it. It does not usually invade high quality areas.

Control Methods:

Mechanical- Eliminating seed dispersal is the most effective way to eradicate bull thistle. Repeated pulling and mowing will weaken it. Mow when flower buds are just opening. Late spring burns are also effective if done in consecutive years.

Chemical- spot application with glyphosate or other selective herbicides.

