

NOXIOUS WEED ALERT

BULL THISTLE

(*Cirsium vulgare*)

- Bull thistle grows three to seven feet tall.
- The stems are prickly, erect and branched near the top
- It grows a rosette during its first year, and blooms during its second
- The flowers heads are smooth and occur in small clusters. Flowers are light lavender to purple, sometimes white
- Leaves are large, spiny, and have large prickly hairs on top and white hairs underneath
- Flower heads are larger, deep purple and spiny. Bracts at base of flowerheads are spine-tipped

Look-a-likes:

Canada thistle, (*Cirsium arvense*), is similar to bull thistle, **except:**

- The leaves are smaller
- Canada thistles grow to be one to three feet tall
- Bull thistle leaves have prickly hairs on the upper surface; Canada thistle leaves are smooth and often shiny



Canada thistle is a Class C weed.

Edible thistle, (*Cirsium edule*), a native thistle which is found mainly in the western part of the county, has soft leaves and a very hairy, drooping flower head. It is harmless and non-invasive.

Distribution: Bull thistle is conspicuous on many roads and pastures in Clallam County.



WHY BE CONCERNED?

- Bull thistle invades many types of habitat, displacing native vegetation and decreasing species diversity.
- It presents an economic threat to farmers because it competes with crops and reduces crop yield.

Bull thistle is a Class C weed.

Ecology:

- Bull thistle grows in almost any type of environment but does not tolerate shade.
- It is a biannual and can reproduce by seed.
- Reproduction happens by seeds only

CONTROL

Prevention and early detection are the best means of control!

- **Practice** good pasture management; avoid overgrazing, irrigate and fertilize as needed, and reseed bare ground. A healthy pasture will resist weed invasion.
- **Use** weed free hay and seed; avoid introducing weed contaminated soil.
- **Clean** equipment that has been used in infested areas.
- **Remove** seedlings when young; newly established plants can usually be pulled without leaving root fragments in the ground.
- **Replant** newly weeded areas with desirable (preferably native) plant species that will discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly, bag or burn seed heads or fragments that may resprout.
- **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

HANDPULLING the plants and digging out the roots can be successful, as well as cutting them. Dispose of plants that have bloomed because they can continue developing and produce seeds.

MOWING is effective if done before the plants begin to flower. If thistles are cut too early before flowering, plants may re-sprout and flower again that season. Remove stems from site if plants are cut or pulled with flowers.

HERBICIDES can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying an herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount. For perennial weeds, long term control requires stopping seed production **and** attacking the weed's root system. Translocated herbicides, (ones that move throughout a plant's system), such as Roundup™ (glyphosate), Curtail™ (2,4-D + clopyralid), Stinger™ (clopyralid) and Banvel™ (dicamba) are recommended.

- **Note:** Roundup™ is non-selective and will damage all plants. The other chemicals will target only broad-leaved plants.
- **Timing** of application is important. Apply herbicide to **actively growing** plants just prior to flowering (bud stage), or early to mid-flowering, depending on the chemical (check your label). Applications to regrowth in the fall, (before freezing occurs) are very effective because the chemical is readily moved with sugars being sent to the roots for winter storage.
- **Cutting** back the plant three to five weeks before applying herbicide will encourage active growth. Applications to active growth increase effectiveness because the herbicide moves around the plant more quickly. Also, herbicide is more easily absorbed by clean, new leaves which have not developed the thickened cuticle (waxy coating) present on mature leaves, which resists herbicide penetration.

Prepared by the **Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board**; revised 3/2015

For more information call: **(360) 417-2442**

or see **www.clallam.net/weed**