

# Thistle

*Cirsium spp.*

*Cirsium* spp. are a genus of flowering plants in the Asteraceae family commonly known as plume thistles. Many species, particularly *Cirsium arvense* (Canada/Creeping Thistle) and *Cirsium vulgare* (Bull/Spear Thistle), are regarded as major, invasive noxious weeds worldwide. They are notorious for invading pastures, crops, disturbed areas, and native habitats, where they compete with native vegetation, reduce agricultural productivity, and cause injury to livestock.

## Identification

**Leaves:** Deeply lobed with spiny, wavy margins.

**Flowers:** Pink to reddish-purple, "pincushion" or "gumdrop-shaped" heads.

**Seeds:** Possess a feathery pappus (thistledown) for wind dispersal.

**Stem:** Often possess spiny, leaf-like "wings" that run down the stem (especially in Bull Thistle).

**Root System:** Can be taprooted (Bull) or creeping rhizomes (Canada).

## Control

**Herbicide:** Systemic, translocated herbicides are necessary to kill the root system. Best Timing: Apply in late summer or early fall when sugars are moving down to the roots, or in spring/early summer at the bud stage. Effective Herbicides: Pastures/Non-Crop: Aminopyralid (Milestone), Clopyralid (Stinger), Dicamba, 2,4-D, and Triclopyr. Glyphosate: Effective, but non-selective (kills surrounding grass). Best used as a spot treatment or with a wiper (5% solution) in late summer/autumn. Spot Treatment: Use herbicides with a surfactant to improve penetration.

**Repeated Mowing/Cutting:** Mowing every 3-4 weeks can exhaust root reserves and prevent seed production. The best time to mow is just before the flower buds open.

**Digging:** For small patches, dig out plants, ensuring the entire root system is removed, as small fragments can resprout.

