



Bull Thistle *Cirsium vulgare* (Savi) Ten.

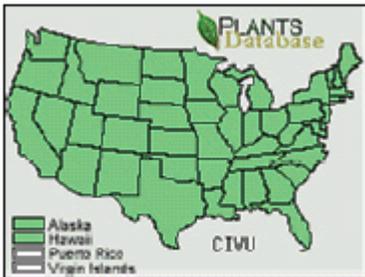
Common Names: bull thistle, common thistle, spear thistle

Native Origin: Europe, western Asia, and North Africa

Description: Bull thistle is a biennial, and sometimes annual or monocarpic perennial in the sunflower family (Asteraceae). In the juvenile phase, individual bull thistle plants form a single rosette with a taproot up to 28 inches (70 cm) long. Rosettes may develop up to 3.3 feet in diameter. The taproot does not spread, but develops several smaller lateral roots. Stems have spiny wings and grow 1 to 6.6 feet tall, with many spreading branches, and sometimes a single stem. Bull thistle stem leaves are more or less lance-shaped and 3 to 12 inches long, prickly hairy on the top and very hairy underneath. Lobes on leaves are tipped with stout spines. Bull thistle flowerheads are 1.5 to 2 inches in diameter, 1 to 2 inches long, usually solitary, and more or less clustered at the ends of shoots and branches. Flowers are subtended by narrow, spine-tipped bracts. Bull thistle fruits are achenes, 1/16 inch long, with a long, hairy plume that is easily detached.



Habitat: It is a widespread weed that can grow in a wide range of environments but is most troublesome in recently or repeatedly disturbed areas such as pastures, overgrazed rangelands, recently burned forests, forest clear-cuts, and along roads, ditches, and fences. It is found on dry and wet soils, but is most common on soils with intermediate moisture.



Distribution: This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is reported invasive in AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MA, MD, MI, MN, MO, NC, NJ, OH, OR, PA, SD, TN, UT, VA, WA, WI, WV, and WY.

Ecological Impacts: Although bull thistle is a problem predominantly in disturbed areas, it also can be found in natural areas. The basal rosette may grow to over 3 feet in diameter before bolting. Once established, bull thistle out-competes native plant species for space, water, and nutrients.



Control and Management:

- **Manual-** Mow to prevent seeding.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate, triclopyr, or dicamba. Follow label and state requirements.
- **Biocontrol:** The seed-feeding fly, *Urophora stylata* Fabricius, has been selected and released for biological control of bull thistle.



References: <http://plants.usda.gov>, www.fs.fed.us/database, <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/cirsvulg.html>, www.invasive.org, www.riparianbuffers.umd.edu/manuals/pannil.html, www.forestryimages.org