

Bull Thistle



Scientific Name:	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>
Weed Class:	C
Requirement:	Control*
Native To:	Europe, Asia & N. Africa
Toxicity:	Not known to be

*In Clark County, control of bull thistle is required when growing on properties adjacent to crops. For details, contact the Weed Board at 360-397-6140 or weed.board@clark.wa.gov

Why is it a noxious weed?

Bull thistle may outcompete native plants and desirable wildlife and livestock forage. It can invade most any disturbed habitat and grow in dense thickets. Hay price declines with bull thistle presence.

How would I identify it?

General Description

Bull thistle is a biennial herbaceous plant from 3 to 7 feet tall with upright branched stems. It grows a rosette (cluster of radiating leaves at plant base) in its first year and blooms in its second year.

Flower Description

Flowers 1.5 to 2 inches across. Bracts at base of flower-heads are spine-tipped. Flowers are purple or rarely white, blooming July through September.



Photo: Sasha Shaw, King County Noxious Weed Control Board

Leaf Description

Leaves alternate and coarsely lobed. Each lobe has a spined tip. Leaf bases extend downward from the leaves along prominent ridges of the stem. Upper leaf surface is rough with bristle-like spines. The undersides are covered with white woolly hairs.

Stem Description

Stems are spiny-winged from leaf bases extending downward producing a winged ridge effect.

Fruit/Seed Description

Seeds are less than 4 mm long.

Where does it grow?

Bull thistle colonizes primarily in disturbed areas such as pastures, roadsides, and ditch banks as well as in hayfields, disturbed prairies and recently logged areas.

How does it reproduce?

Bull thistle reproduces by seed.



How do I control Bull Thistle?

The most effective way to manage weed infestations is to research, plan for, and use a combination of prevention and control methods specific to the problem weed. This approach is called **I**ntegrated **W**eed **M**anagement (IWM), which uses mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical control methods that effectively treat the problem weed yet protect human health, habitat, water, and other natural resources.

IWM Control Method	Effectiveness of Control			Timing and Notes ***
	Good	Fair	Poor	
Digging	G			Effective. Practical for small infestations.
Hand-Pulling	G			Pull plants after they bolt but before they flower.
Mowing		F		Avoid mowing plants in full flower, as cut flowers may contain viable seed. Mowing may need to be repeated several times to prevent new flowers/seeds.
Tilling	G			Till to depth of three inches.
Bark Mulch			P	Not effective as a sole control method. May stop seed germination.
Black Plastic	G			
Cover Crop			P	Not effective as a sole control method. First till or apply herbicide.
Native Plant Restoration			P	Not effective as a sole control method.
Soil Amendments			P	Not effective as a sole control method.
Managed Grazing		F		Goats will eat seedlings, rosettes, and flowering heads.
Weed-Feeding Insects			P	<i>Urophora Stylata</i> . Not effective as a sole control method.
Herbicides - (Examples*)		<i>For most effective control, apply herbicides before plants bloom.</i>		
Aminopyralid	Milestone	G		Best if applied to plants in rosette stage, in the spring, before stem elongation. Fall treatment of newly-germinated plants is also effective.
Glyphosate	Roundup;		F	Glyphosate is effective on Bull Thistle but is not the best option for pastures since it will kill grass.
Triclopyr	Garlon; Vastlan; Crossbow	G		Crossbow is more effective than triclopyr-only products. Spray in the spring, before flowering. Fall spray of new plants is also effective.

*Brand names are listed as examples only. Other products may contain the listed chemical. Clark County does not endorse any product or brand name. *Always read and follow the herbicide label.*

****Timing of control is critical!** Herbicide treatments are often not effective or appropriate when plants are in flower. If the weeds have produced seed, bag the plants and place in garbage, not compost. Regardless of control method chosen, multiple treatments may be needed each year. For more information on IWM, specific herbicides, and timing of control, please contact the Weed Board at:



Clark County Noxious Weed Control Board • Vegetation Management

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