

Bull thistle

Cirsium vulgare (Savi) Tenore

Life cycle: Erect, spiny biennial.

Leaves: First-year leaves originate from a basal rosette, followed by an erect, branched, flowering stem in the second year. Seedlings have egg- to spatula-shaped cotyledons and oval, oblong to spatula-shaped leaves with bumpy surfaces and marginal spines. Mature leaves are alternate, lance-shaped, deeply cut or lobed, with long, stiff spines. Leaves have coarse hairs above and soft, cottony hairs below.

Stems: Spiny-winged, hairy stems elongate during the second year, often branched up to 7 feet tall.

Flowers and fruit: Red to purple, usually solitary flower heads consisting of only disk flowers are 1 to 2 inches wide and encircled by spine-tipped bracts. The seed is enclosed in a single-seeded, chili- pepper-shaped, wind-disseminated fruit.

Reproduction: Seeds.



Bull thistle seedling.



Bull thistle flower head.



Bull thistle rosette.



Coarse hairs on the upper leaf surface of bull thistle.

Bull thistle *continued...*

Similar weeds

Canada thistle [*C. arvensis* (L.) Scop.]. Differs by having a prolific, patch-forming perennial nature with a deep, creeping root system; leaves with smooth, dark green upper leaf surfaces and irregularly lobed to crinkled, spiny margins; and smaller (less than 1-inch wide) pink to purple flower heads with spineless bracts.



Canada thistle flower head.



Canada thistle mature flower heads.



Canada thistle plant.

All photos this page: Steven A. Gower