

Bull thistle

Cirsium vulgare (Savi) Tenore

Life cycle

Erect, spiny biennial.

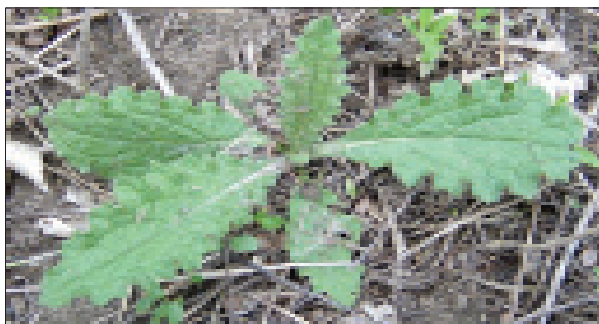
Leaves

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.



Bull thistle flower head.



Bull thistle rosette.

Asteraceae (Aster family)

Bull thistle *continued*

Stems

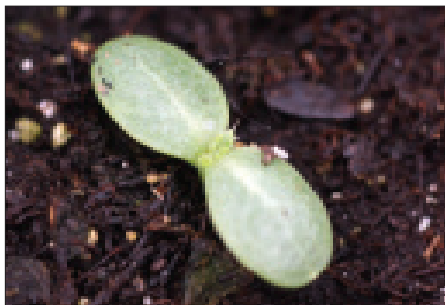
Spiny-winged, hairy stems elongate during the second year, often branched up to 7 feet tall.

Flowers and fruit

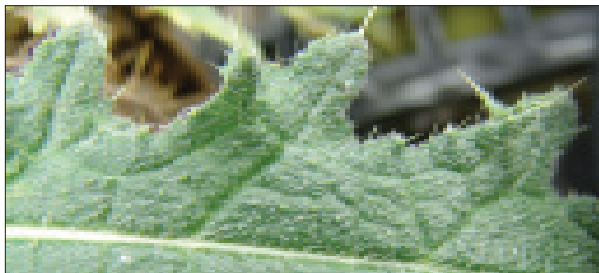
Red to purple, usually solitary flower heads consisting of only disk flowers are 1 to 2 inches wide and encircled by spine-tipped bracts. The seed is enclosed in a single-seeded, chili-pepper-shaped, wind-disseminated fruit.

Reproduction

Seeds.



Bull thistle seedling.



Coarse hairs on the upper leaf surface of bull thistle.

Asteraceae (Aster family)

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



Canada thistle flower head.



Canada thistle mature flower



Canada thistle plant.

Asteraceae (Aster family)