



Weed Wise



Biennial Thistles

Four biennial thistles are invasive species that pose a particular threat to native plant communities and agricultural areas in Garfield County. The four thistles on Garfield County's noxious weed list are bull (*Cirsium vulgare*), musk (*Carduus nutans*), plumeless (*Carduus acanthoides*) and Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*).

As biennials, they germinate, flower and complete their lifecycle within a two to three-year period. They are less difficult to control than the deep-rooted perennial, Canada thistle. All four thistles reproduce from seeds which may remain viable in the soil for up to 10 years.

Management

The best time to manage biennial thistles is in the spring when they are in the rosette stage of growth. The key to controlling these thistles is to prevent seed production. When pulling or digging the plants, be sure to completely remove the crown so the plant does not re-flower. Remember to re-visit the area since all plants do not germinate at the same time.

Chemical treatment recommendations will vary depending on the specific site and surrounding land use.

Disturbed areas are magnets for invasive thistles. Reseeding with appropriate native plants at the correct time of year will help provide competition for these invasive plants.

Not all thistles are noxious weeds. Colorado has several species of native thistles that have ecological value. They are a resource for pollinators, seed feeders, and browsing wildlife. An excellent handbook is "Thistles of Colorado: Identification and Management Guide," produced by the Larimer County Weed District. It has photos and descriptions of both native and noxious thistles.

For more information, a copy of "Thistles of Colorado," and treatment recommendations, contact Garfield County Vegetation Management at 970-945-1377, ext. 4305 or santhony@garfield-county.com.



Scotch Thistle



Scotch Thistle rosette

