

Canada thistle

ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family

Cirsium arvense (L.) Scop. [= *Carduus arvensis* (L.) Robson]



Common Name: Canada thistle (creeping thistle, Californian thistle, field thistle)

Growth Form: Forb

Life Span: Perennial

Origin: Eurasia and North Africa

Flowering Dates: June-August

Reproduction: Rhizomes and seeds

Height: 0.3-1.2 m (1-3.9 ft)

Inflorescence: Dioecious; heads in corymb-like clusters; involucre (1-2 cm tall, 5-10 mm wide) with 5 or 6 series of bracts; bracts ovate (2-6 mm long, 0.7-1.2 mm wide), gradually pointed and rarely short-spined

Flower: Pink to purple (rarely white) disk florets; staminate corollas 1.2-1.5 cm long; pistillate corollas 1.8-2.5 cm long

Fruit: Achene oblong (2.5-4 mm long, 1-1.5 mm wide), dark brown to tan, flattened, curved; pappus of white bristles (1.5-2.5 cm long); seeds 1

Seed: Small

Leaves: Alternate; blades simple; lower stem blades oblong to oblanceolate (5-18 cm long, 1.5-6 cm wide); margins shallowly to pinnately lobed to entire, lobes and margins short-spined, surfaces white tomentose to without hair, sessile to petiolate, clasping or not; upper stem blades similar except reduced upwards, less lobed, sessile

Stems: Erect, branching above, ridged, surfaces without hair above and pubescent below, hollow, forming dense colonies

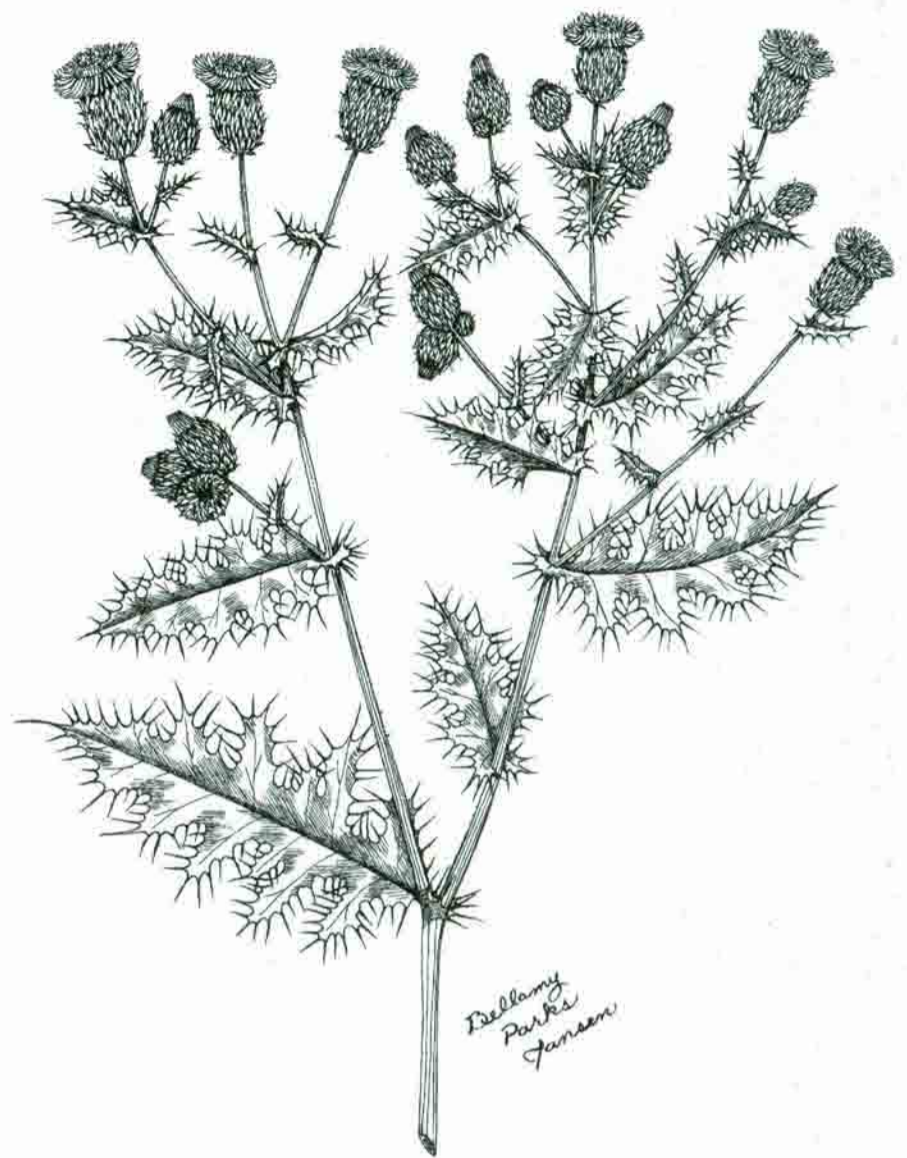
Underground: Rhizomes, fleshy, extensive, creeping

Where Found: Central and northern Great Plains on rangeland, pastures, cropland, ditch banks, roadsides, mud flats, stream and lake banks, and disturbed sites. Canada thistle can be especially abundant in deep and moist soil. (NE, SD, ND, KS, MN, IA, MO, MT, WY, CO, AB, SK, & MB)

Uses and Values: Canada thistle seeds are eaten by songbirds. It sometimes furnishes nesting cover for rails and shorebirds.

Poisoning: Canada thistle has been reported to accumulate toxic levels of nitrates.

Other: Canada thistle is an aggressive weed and is classified as a noxious weed throughout the Great Plains. This species is dioecious (staminate and pistillate flowers on different plants), thus large patches may not produce any seed. However, the patches may continue to become larger because of the creeping root system.



Heads are only 1 cm in diameter or smaller and rarely white as shown in this photograph.

Leaf margins are shallowly to pinnately lobed to entire with short spines on the margins.

