

THISTLE

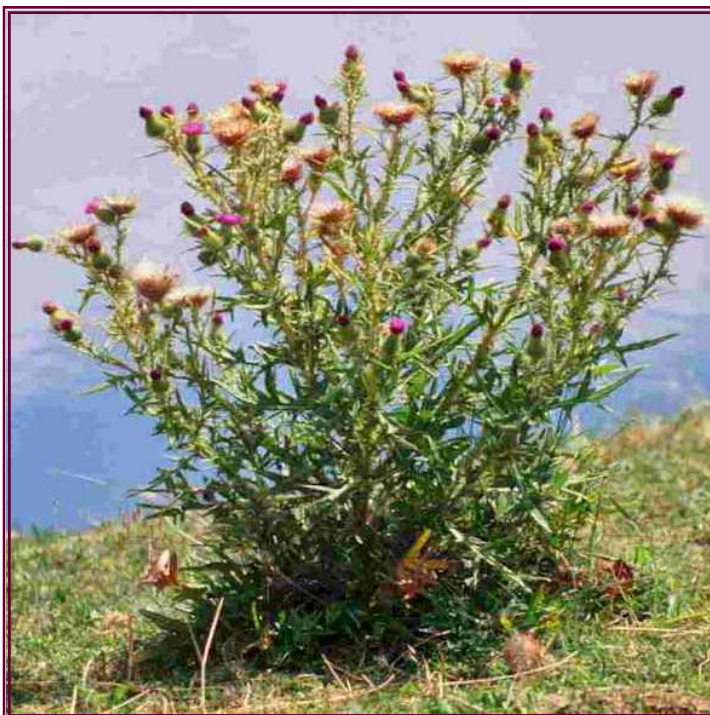
THISTLE?

Thistle is a biennial species that reproduces by seed and can be found throughout Minnesota. Thistle grows 2 to 6 feet tall containing a heavily branched stem. Its leaves are green with yellow tipped spines. Leaf bases run down the stem giving it a winged appearance. The plants flower head grows 1 to 2 inches in diameter and blooms from June through September. Thistle typically lives for two years and form a low-growing rosette of leaves the first year, followed by a taller flower and seed-bearing stem the second year. Its best to eliminate the plant during its first year reducing its chance to bloom and produce seeds.



ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Thistle produces millions of wind-dispersed seeds that rapidly colonize areas of disturbed ground such as pastures, roadsides, and ditch banks, but also in hayfields and prairies. Thistle is distasteful to most grazing animals giving it the competitive edge. Although thistle is a biennial plant, infestations persist for years in grassy areas to the exclusion of other herbaceous plants due to the buildup of buried seed.



CONTROLLING THISTLE

The first step to proper thistle control is its identification. Once identified biennial thistles can be controlled by pulling and mowing. Larger patches can be controlled by digging and cultivation. Once removed dispose of immediately to prevent spreading of the seeds. Broadleaf herbicides containing 2,4-D and MCPP can control thistles in lawns. In gardens, it may be best to spot treat thistles with a non-selective herbicide containing glyphosate, such as Round-up.