

# Kansas Plant Pest Alert

Kansas Department of Agriculture • Plant Protection and Weed Control • (785) 862-2180 • www.ksda.gov

## Canada Thistle



**IF YOU FIND  
EVIDENCE OF  
CANADA THISTLE,  
CONTACT THE  
KANSAS DEPARTMENT  
OF  
AGRICULTURE**

**BACKGROUND:** In spite of its common name, Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop.) is an introduced, invasive plant species native to southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. The plant has the dubious distinction of being one of the United States' first noxious weeds with control legislation enacted by Vermont in 1795. Today, the species had been declared noxious in 33 U.S. states and 6 Canadian provinces with introductions throughout the world.

**DESCRIPTION:** Canada thistle is a perennial, one to four feet tall, with an extensive, spreading root system. The stems appear in April to mid-May and have alternate, irregularly-lobed leaves with prickly margins. Canada thistle has both male or female flower clusters, called heads, on separate plants. The heads of both sexes are purple colored (rarely pink or white) and bloom from June to August. A single female plant can produce over 5,000 seeds per year.

**INFESTATION AND SPREAD POTENTIAL:** Quick identification and eradication of Canada thistle is essential to prevent its spread. Once established and under ideal conditions, the Canada thistle root system can produce lateral roots more than 15 feet away from the parent plant and vertical roots up to 10 feet deep into the soil. A combination of stewardship practices, mechanical control and herbicides should be investigated for an integrated management strategy in reducing Canada thistle infestations.

**IS CANADA THISTLE IN KANSAS?** Canada thistle has been historically documented throughout Kansas with the northwestern corner of the state having been most impacted by this invasive plant.



Department of Agriculture  
Plant Protection and Weed Control  
PO Box 19282  
Topeka, KS 66619  
(785) 862-2180  
www.ksda.gov/plant\_protection

### **IF YOU SUSPECT YOU HAVE FOUND ONE OF THESE PLANTS:**

1. Photograph the plant at the site.
2. Collect a specimen including roots if possible and press between sheets of newspaper.
3. Record the location noting landmarks along with the legal description
4. Describe the type of land use (cropland, road ditch, waste area, pasture).
5. Describe the location (rocky, wet, dry, sandy).
6. Contact the state weed specialist at the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Plant Protection and Weed Control program.