

CC. Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Key Characteristics:

Bull thistle is a member of the Sunflower family. It is a biennial, living its first year as a low-growing **rosette**, up to 1 foot in diameter; Bull Thistle bolts in its second year to produce a **stem** 2 to 5 feet tall, bearing many spreading, slightly hairy branches with spiny wings. **Leaves** are alternate, 3-12 inches long, pinnately-lobed, hairy and prickly on the upper side while cottony underneath. Gumdrop-shaped **blooms** appear July through September and are pink to dark purple and 1½ to 2 inches in diameter. Involucres are somewhat tapered and covered with spines. **Seeds** are capped with a circle of plume-like white hairs.



Locations:

Bull thistle can be found in the Crystal River Valley and Capitol Creek regions. Plants have also been found in Snowmass Village and at the Pitkin County Airport.

Biological control:

The **Thistle Stem Gall Fly**, *Urophora stylata*, is used to help control this thistle. Females lay eggs on the seed-head. The maggot then consumes the seed in the flower. This species has overwintered in Colorado, but the limited numbers will not allow for general redistribution. For more information contact the Colorado Department of Agriculture Insectary in Palisade.

Cultural control:

Good vegetative cover helps slow establishment, but Bull Thistle can invade healthy stands including healthy lawns.

Mechanical control:

Bull thistle will not withstand regular cutting or tillage. Don't let it go to seed; carefully cut and bag if flower heads are present.

Chemical control:

Contact Pitkin County Land Management Department for more specific information about herbicide products, application rates, and equipment calibration.

Native Look-Alikes:

There are several Native Thistles in Pitkin County which may be confused with Bull Thistle. See Appendix B for more information about Native Thistles.