



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681ext.6
<https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl

The sluggish start to spring has put vegetative development behind schedule, which is something to take in to account in regards to planning for treatments of weeds. I'm hoping by the time this gets published the weather will have snapped out of the perpetual funk of low temperatures and high precipitation (including snow at times), although I won't hold my breath! With the anticipation that conditions will eventually reflect the time of year, it will be time to get out on the lands and deal with the weeds. Bonner County offers a financial assistance program for residents that group together to spray state listed noxious weeds on non-commercial property; the funds come primarily from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture via grants with the county contributing some supplemental funds. The program may provide up to \$500 per landowner for reimbursement of herbicide costs and the pre-application is due to the Bonner County Weeds office by May 31. This application is available at said office as well as the website. Feel free to contact me for more details.

One of those state listed noxious weeds that Bonner County residents battle on a regular basis is **Canada Thistle** (*Cirsium arvense*), weed of the month for May. Most thistles are biennials, but this one is a perennial, and a voracious one at that. Grows 1 to 5 feet tall with spiny lobed leaves and disk flowers that range in color from light lavender to rose-purple. At a glance while in the flowering stage, Canada Thistle may appear similar to Spotted Knapweed until you see the plant structure. Propagation is equally as prolific by seed as it is by roots—the root system of each plant travels 15 feet deep and 20 feet laterally, producing shoots vegetatively along the way. The seeds are very lightweight and disperse in the wind, up to 5,000 of them per stem.

Canada Thistle is found in a myriad of locations; ranges/pastures, lawns/turf, forest production lands, meadows, roadsides, gardens and stream banks. A small patch can become a large patch in a hurry due to the rapid spread, don't let it go to seed! The seeds can travel up to 2 miles infecting your neighbor's land, and the seed viability in the soil can be 20+ years. The impact Canada Thistle has on the landscape is extensive—it can take over a pasture and crowd out desirable forage for livestock as quickly as you might imagine given the rate of spread, and it can cause serious damage to agricultural crops by not only outcompeting the crop for resources but harboring destructive aphids. In addition, if Canada Thistle finds its way in to your yard, you (or your kids and/or grandkids) can forget about walking barefoot on the lawn.



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Control is somewhat of a challenge [for reasons described above], at least from the standpoint of integrated management. Repeated mowing is a method that may suppress flower formation, which will keep the plants from producing seed but they will continue to spread with their lateral roots. Cultivation will only provide control if performed every 2-3 weeks (minimum) throughout the entire growing season, otherwise you will only enhance the spread by increasing root fragments. Keep in mind, if mechanical control is the desired approach the key is to exhaust the root system of stored nutrients, this requires persistence. Biological control options are limited, at best. A stem gall fly has been used with hopes of reducing plant vigor and stopping or slowing flower production, however it has not had any notable impacts on Canada Thistle populations and is no longer released. As far as grazing, it's a long shot—goats may graze the flower heads but the plants themselves are too spiny for consumption. There are several herbicides on the market that provide some degree of control for Canada Thistle, I will share a few that have shown to be successful, but remember to always read product labels. In range & pasture situations Milestone® (aminopyralid) may provide up to 3 years of control, this chemistry is lethal on thistles and if you have a use site allowable by the label this one is a great option. Transline® or Stinger® (clopyralid) can be used alongside and over the top of conifers safely in forestry applications and is an effective option on thistles. In turf situations Crossbow® (triclopyr + 2,4-D ester) or Trimec® (2,4-D amine + dicamba) have shown to be adequate options on those use sites. Contact the Bonner County Weeds office or visit your favorite herbicide supplier for further advice on product choices and allowable use sites. Thinking about nicer days...I'm doing my sunshine dance right now. ☺