



Cirsium arvense
Canada thistle

Why Observe?

Although *Cirsium arvense* is native to southeastern Europe and eastern regions of the Mediterranean, it has spread to most of the temperate areas of the world. It was accidentally introduced into North America during the 17th century as a contaminant in crop seed. Today, in cooler areas of North America, the plant is especially troublesome and hard to keep under control.

Tips for Identification

Canada thistle is an erect, perennial, herbaceous plant growing 1 to 5 feet tall, with some branching along slightly hairy stems. Male and female flowers occur separately on different plants. Tiny, rose-purple, lavender or white flowers are tightly clustered into flowerheads appearing like a single flower at the top of the branches. Plants are often connected by underground roots and form large patches.

Be aware there is variation from individual to individual within a species, so your plant may not look exactly like the one pictured. If you are uncertain whether or not a phenophase is occurring, report a “?” for its status until it becomes clear what you are observing after subsequent visits.



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Image Needed

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Initial growth

New growth of the plant is visible after a period of no growth (winter or drought), either from above-ground buds with green tips, or new green or white shoots breaking through the soil surface. Growth is considered "initial" on each bud or shoot until the first leaf has fully unfolded. For seedlings, "initial" growth includes the presence of the one or two small, round or elongated leaves (cotyledons) before the first true leaf has unfolded.



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Leaves

One or more live, fully unfolded leaves are visible on the plant. For seedlings, consider only true leaves and do not count the one or two small, round or elongated leaves (cotyledons) that are found on the stem almost immediately after the seedling germinates. Do not include fully dried or dead leaves.



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Flowers or flower buds

One or more fresh open or unopened flowers or flower buds are visible on the plant. Include flower buds or inflorescences that are swelling or expanding, but do not include those that are tightly closed and not actively growing (dormant). Also do not include wilted or dried flowers.



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Open flowers

One or more open, fresh flowers are visible on the plant. Flowers are considered "open" when the reproductive parts (male stamens or female pistils) are visible between or within unfolded or open flower parts (petals, floral tubes or sepals). Do not include wilted or dried flowers.



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Fruits

One or more fruits are visible on the plant. For *Cirsium arvense*, the fruit is very tiny and seed-like and is crowded into a spent flower head. The seed-like fruit has a tuft of white fluff, and changes from whitish-yellow or yellow-green to tan, light yellow or light brown and drops or is blown from the plant after the spent flower head reopens. Do not include empty flower heads that have already dropped all of their fruits.



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Ripe fruits

One or more ripe fruits are visible on the plant. For *Cirsium arvense*, a fruit is considered ripe when the spent flower head has reopened and the white fluff is visible. Do not include empty flower heads that have already dropped all of their fruits.

Phenophases not pictured: Recent fruit or seed drop