

Weed of The Week

Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Bull thistle is a spiny perennial weed that is found throughout Ohio. Bull thistle is a low-growing basal rosette during its first year. During its rosette stage, leaves are hairy on the upper surface and irregularly indented around the edge with groups of 2 or 3 spine-tipped lobes interspersed with unlobed portions. Bull thistle rosettes remain green and continue growing during winter. The rosette is 3 feet in diameter by the following spring when it gives rise to a 5-foot-tall upright flowering stem. Stems have distinctly spiny wings and produce solitary, purple, globe-shaped flower heads on the ends of branches. The flower heads contain hundreds of tiny flowers. The seeds are distinct straw-colored, plume-like bristles that are easily dispersed by wind and human and animal traffic. Each flower produces up to 250 fluffy seeds; each plant can produce up to 4,000 in a season. Bull thistle will form a dense thicket, displacing other vegetation. Bull thistle spines can irritate the mouths of grazing livestock and significantly reduce weight gain.

Unlike Canada Thistle, which produces creeping roots and rhizomes that spread great distances, bull thistle forms a fleshy taproot, making hand removal effective for young plants. When handling bull thistle, be mindful of wearing gloves as this plant is spiky. Severing the taproot below ground level should also kill bull thistle. Applying a herbicide in the fall of the rosette stage can effectively prevent sprouting in the following year. Pre-emergent herbicides such as Dithiopyr (Dimension) can be used in landscapes and turf. Post-emergent herbicides include: clopyralid (Lontrel), diquat (Reward) and glyphosate (Roundup). Remember to always read the label for proper application sites and rates.

