

2017 Weed Identification Series



Bull Thistle

Biennial that germinates in the spring forming a circular arrangement of leaves called a rosette. Plants remain as a rosette for the first year and produce a stem, flower, then die in the second year.

Leaves: Deeply lobed leaves 3-6 inches long. Each lobe is tipped with a sharp spine $\frac{1}{2}$ in long. Leaves wrinkled and have hairs on both sides of the leaf. Underside of leaves are a lighter green color.

Stem: Leaves extend onto stem forming a winged appearance with spines. Stems are typically 2-3 ft high but can be > 5 ft.

Flower: Purple, gum drop shaped flowers 1 - 2 in wide that occur at the end of stems. Spiny bracts are present below petals. Plants begin to bloom in July - August (2-3 weeks after other thistles).

Similar Plants: This plant is confused with other biennial thistles. See other biennial thistle factsheets for additional information and a side-by-side comparison factsheet. Canada thistle is also similar but it is a perennial with creeping lateral roots that form dense clones. Flowers are also much smaller than other common biennial thistles. Several native thistles are also present to Wisconsin, but are not common in agricultural settings.