

2017 Weed Identification Series



Plumeless 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 with spines. Basal leaves are 4-8 inches long and have distinct long hairs on the midrib of the back of the leaf. Leaves on the stem are small and alternate, becoming spine-like.

Stem: Typically 2-3 ft tall but can exceed 5 ft. Stems are covered in leaves and many leaf-like spines.

Flower: Purple (occasionally white) flowers 0.3 to 1 in wide at the end of stems. Small, spiny bracts are present below petals. Plants begin to bloom in late June through early August.

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.