

Field Scabious

Knautia arevensis



Description:

Field scabious is a perennial forb that reproduces by seed. It develops a low growing rosette of leaves with toothed edges in its first year of growth, and a tall, flowering bolt in the second year. It produces a woody taproot that is often branched.

Stems are erect, hairy, sparsely branched, and grow up to 1.5 m tall. There is generally only one stem per plant.

Leaves are entire and coarsely toothed at the base, while stem leaves are deeply lobed (feather-shaped) and opposite. Lower leaves are 10-25 cm long but are smaller higher on the plant.

Flowers are small, violet-blue to purple and clustered into a head resembling a single flower up to 4 cm wide, and occur singly on stems. Below the flower head is a ring of narrow green bracts.



Control

Introduced to North America as an ornamental plant, Field scabious prefers nutrient-rich and moderately dry loam soils, but also establishes in gravelly soil. It can invade undisturbed plant communities, and once established is difficult to control. A single plant can produce up to 2000 seeds that can remain viable in the soil for many years. Most seeds fall from the plant, but wildlife and livestock also nip off flower heads, facilitating seed dispersal in droppings and manure. The flowers closely resemble those of *Scabiosa* (butterfly plant, pincushion flower), an ornamental perennial. The leaves of some rosettes can look very similar to those of spotted knapweed.

Small infestations of young plants can be hand-pulled, but removal of only the stems encourages re-sprouting. Long sleeves and gloves are advised for hand-pulling, because skin contact with the leaves and hairy stems causes a fair amount of itching. Cultivation effectively manages this weed if done before flowering – not an option in natural areas.

A couple of herbicides provide good control when applied at the appropriate growth stage. But any Field scabious infestation that has been allowed to go to seed a few times will require several years of diligent control work to eradicate.

