

Spotted Knapweed

Centaurea maculosa

Description:

Primarily a biennial plant – producing a rosette the first year and a flowering bolt the second – but can also be a short-lived perennial, blooming for a few years before dying. Spotted knapweed can self-pollinate and is also cross-pollinated by insects.

Stems are upright and branched, growing up to 1.5 m tall. There may be one or a few stems per plant.



Leaves of rosettes are up to 15 cm long and deeply lobed. On bolting stems the leaves alternate and become pinnately divided (feather-like) and can be slightly hairy.

Flowers are borne singly at the ends of branches. The flowers are pinkish-purple but can occasionally be a creamy white. Bracts on the flower's base have black tips, distinguishing it from other knapweed species.

Control

Spotted knapweed is commonly found on well-drained, light to coarse textured soils, but is intolerant of dense shade. It prefers moister habitats than Diffuse knapweed. This invasive plant is very competitive and widely distributed throughout North America. Infestations often form near monocultures can even extend into relatively undisturbed plant communities, displacing forage for wildlife and livestock. A prolific seed producer – individual plants can produce over 140,000 per year – control is extremely difficult on established infestations.



Knapweeds have become well known because of their almost wholesale degradation of large tracts of rangeland in the northwestern US and parts of southern BC. While livestock and wildlife will graze the plant, this compounds the problem as viable seed is distributed in their droppings and manure. Knapweed contaminated hay or plant skeletons caught in vehicle undercarriages often contribute to spread.

Cutting or pulling before flowering can be effective on small infestations, but will require several years' effort to eradicate. Remove as much of the root system as possible to prevent re-sprouting. Bare skin contact with knapweed can cause irritation, so wear gloves.

Several herbicides are effective on Spotted knapweed – residual products are the most effective but also the most likely to cause off-target damage if not used correctly. A plethora of biological control agents are available and have caused dramatic reductions in plant size, and therefore seed production in some areas.

Minimizing soil disturbance and maintaining healthy, weed resistant plant communities is your first defense against knapweed. Knowing how to identify the knapweeds and all the ways seed can be spread will afford the best chances for eradication.