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INVASIVE PLANTS

Knapweed *Centaurea spp.*

History

Knapweed (*Centaurea spp.*) in the family Asteraceae, was introduced to the Pacific Northwest in the 1890s from Eurasia. Knapweed, an adept invader of disturbed soils, is problematic in prairies, rangelands, and old fields. It can become a monoculture outcompeting grazing plants in rangelands, reducing nesting cover for song birds, and increasing surface water run-off. Knapweed gains an advantage over native plants through its early spring growth and through a chemical it emits into the soil that is toxic to surrounding species of plants. Although knapweed causes environmental and agricultural problems, it is also known for the wonderful tasting honey bees make from its nectar, called Star Thistle Honey.



How Can I Identify It?

First year plants remain a rosette which has 5-12 lobed leaves. The second year plants produce several branched flowering stems. The knapweeds are short lived perennials that bloom June through October. Flowers range from light purple to pinkish-red in spotted, squarrose, and meadow knapweeds. In diffuse knapweed the flowers are white. The flowers resemble thistle flowers, but have stiff bracts which appear spotted in spotted knapweed, and are hairy in meadow, diffuse, and squarrose knapweed. Each 1 - 3 foot tall plant has many slender, hairy, erect stems with alternating, deeply lobed leaves. Both stems and leaves are grayish-green in most varieties.

How Can Spotted Knapweed Be Controlled?

- NAP's preferred method of control is hand-pulling.
- Large infestations as first year rosettes are best controlled with herbicide.
- For more information on control methods visit The Nature Conservancy website at: <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu>



Knapweed rosette.



Spotted knapweed flower showing spotted bracts.

What Can I Do?

- If you see a small infestation, pull it. When pulling be sure to remove the root to prevent re-sprouting from root fragments. Pulled plants should be bagged and taken to a municipal compost facility to prevent the spread of seed. Please wear a long sleeve shirt and gloves and wash up after pulling this plant. It can be irritating to the skin for sensitive individuals.
- Stay on, and keep pets on, established roads and trails to prevent invasive seed dispersal.
- After visiting an area that has spotted knapweed, or other invasive weeds present, clean up before you leave the site! Make sure your clothes, shoes, vehicles, and pets are mud and/or seed free.
- Use plants native to southeastern Michigan in upcoming landscaping projects. NAP has a series of brochures to assist you in choosing native plants for your garden.
- Participate in NAP-sponsored volunteer workdays to remove spotted knapweed and other invasives from city natural areas.
- Learn to identify knapweed and other invasive weeds. Invasive herbaceous plants NAP would appreciate help with are:

garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)

bittercress (*Cardamine impatiens*)

knapweed (*Centaurea spp.*)

Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)

lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*)

dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*)

golden archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*)

common motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*)

purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)

Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)