

Bull vs. Canada Thistle

Cirsium vulgare and *Cirsium arvense*



IDENTIFICATION AND COMPARISON GUIDE

Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and **Canada Thistle** (*Cirsium arvense*) are evergreen perennials, both of the *Cirsium* genus in the *Asteraceae* family. These shiny, green and spiky thistles grow up to 2m tall and have globe-shaped flowers at the end of their stems. Forming rosettes in their first year, they grow more erect and produce flowers later on.

Bull Thistle

(*Cirsium vulgare*)

Canada Thistle

(*Cirsium arvense*)

Flowers



Similarities:

Both have pink-purple to white flowers at the end of their branches.

Bull Thistle flowers are larger:

4 - 5 cm wide and covered in spines



Canada Thistle flowers are smaller:

1 - 2 cm wide and spineless



Fruit



Similarities:

Seeds are about 2 mm long, attached to a long plume that catches the wind.



Bull Thistle

(*Cirsium vulgare*)

Canada Thistle

(*Cirsium arvense*)

Stems



Similarities:

Bull Thistle and Canada Thistle both have erect stems that grow up to 2 m tall.

Bull Thistle stems are spiky:

Stiff and covered in spines



Canada Thistle stems are smooth:

No spines on the main stem



Leaves



Similarities:

Bull Thistle and Canada Thistle both have dark green, deeply lobed leaves with distinct pointed tips and white hairs on the undersides. Both form rosettes in first year.

Bull Thistle leaves are larger:

Up to 30 cm long



Canada Thistle leaves are smaller:

0.5 - 17 cm long



References: Canadian Weed Science Society, Coastal Invasive Species Committee, Eflora BC, Invasive Species Council of British Columbia, Government of BC, Invasive Species Compendium, King County, Lincoln County, Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbooks, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, University of California Davis, Urban Bee Network, Washington State University Whatcom County Extension.

REPORT SIGHTINGS

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Sea to Sky Invasive Species Council | www.ssisc.ca | 604-698-8334 | info@ssisc.ca