

Black Knapweed

Invasive Species Alert Sheet

Capital Region Invasive Species Program

The spread of non-native invasive plants has serious ecological, economic and health impacts. Local governments and other partners are asking for help from all residents to address black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) outbreaks on private property and public lands. This plant is native to the Mediterranean and outbreaks in the capital region are primarily in Metchosisin.

Why is black knapweed a problem?

- Highly prolific seed producer, forms monocultures
- Large infestations increase runoff and erosion, leading to sedimentation of watercourses
- Alters soil chemistry, preventing the growth of other plants and making pasture unpalatable to grazing animals
- Displaces native vegetation and agricultural crops
- Dead plant material can increase risk of fire



What does it look like?

- **Tap-rooted perennial, 30-150 cm tall**
- **Stems:** First year plant forms woolly rosettes close to the ground. Second year plants produce flowering, upward stems.
- **Leaves:** Leaves are lance-shaped, undivided and widest at the base or middle. They have leaf stalks and decrease in size up the stem (and may lose leaf stalks). Leaves on the lower portion of the stem are 5-20 cm long.
- **Flowers:** Thistle-like flowers are purple and occur singly at the end of stems and branches. They are composed of 40-100 tubular florets. The base of the flower is oval to globe-shaped, 15-18 mm in diameter, covered with stiff black/brown bracts with long black fringes
- **Seeds:** tan coloured, approximately 3 mm, finely hairy with black bristles
- This species can be confused with other knapweed species such as spotted knapweed (*Centaurea biebersteinii*) or diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*).

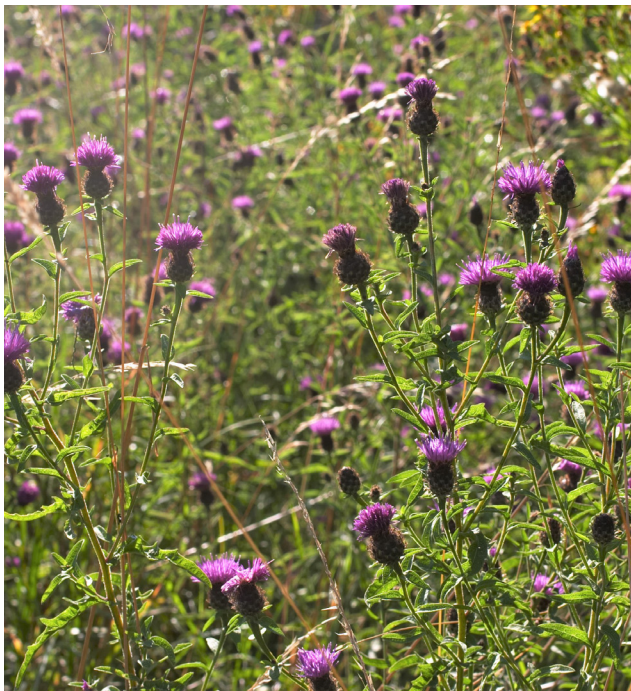
Habitat and biology

- Tolerates a wide range of conditions and habitats, but grows best in disturbed, well-drained soils and full sun
- Found in open fields, meadows, roadsides and ditches
- Escapee from ornamental gardens and ship ballast
- Perennial in the sunflower (Asteraceae) family
- Flowers from June-October
- Reproduces by seed, can regenerate from the crown and by root spread
- Seeds spread by wind, water, soil, agricultural produce, animals, machinery and vehicles
- Over 18,000 seeds per plant produced annually
- Seeds can remain viable in soil for at least five years

Proper disposal

- Please place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled “invasive species” and take to Hartland Landfill
- **Do not compost!** Flowers can still form viable seeds after removal

Please report all infestations (both small and large infestations) to the contacts at the end of this document.



First year rosette growth

What should you do if you spot a black knapweed plant?

- **Prevent spread:** Don't buy, grow or trade this plant. Clean off footwear, pets, equipment, & vehicles when in areas where this species may be present and reduce spread by using clean soil, gravel and hay/straw free from seeds
- **Inform:** report outbreaks to the contacts listed below for support and monitoring
- **Remove:** if you have an outbreak on your property, please follow instructions below for removal

For small infestations (less than 25-30 plants):

- **Manually remove:** before flowering, dig or pull to avoid soil disturbance
- **Cut:** if unable to remove entire root, cut the root about 3 cm below ground
- **Bag flowers/seeds:** if in flower or seed, carefully remove and bag flowers/seedheads and bag before digging
- **Clean before leaving:** to avoid further spread, wash/brush off footwear, vehicles and equipment before leaving site
- **Monitor:** return in spring and fall for a few years to monitor growth and remove new plants
- **Replant:** especially in disturbed areas, replant with non-invasive or native plants

Black Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*)

Key Characteristics

- 1st year plants form rosettes of wooly-looking leaves close to the ground
- Leaf shape can vary widely. Basal (lowest) leaves can be deeply lobed.
- Flowers from June-October
- Prolific seed producer-seeds are tan coloured and finely hairy with black bristles



Thistle-like purple flowers on stiff brown bracts

Stem leaves are lance-shaped, undivided and decrease in size moving up the stem



Base of the flower is oval to globe-shaped, and covered with stiff, fringed, brown/black bracts



2nd year plants produce flowering, upward stems

Stems and leaves are covered with fine white hairs, making the plant appear woolly



Black Knapweed Look-alike Species

Thistle species (*Cirsium* sp.)

INVASIVE

- Leaves are crinkled, deeply lobed and have sharp, spiny edges
- Flowers become seed heads that look like a dandelion
- Flower bases (bracts) can be spine-tipped



Hawkweed species (*Heiracium* sp.)

INVASIVE & NATIVE

- Leaves are variably hairy, leaf edges may be slightly toothed
- Flowers are dandelion-like and can be orange-red or yellow
- Stems have a milky sap when broken
- Flowering stems grow to 60cm



Ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*)

EXOTIC

- Leaves are waxy and mostly hairless with distinctive parallel ribs or veins
- Flowering stem has distinctive, greenish-white flowers densely packed along the stalk
- Flowering stems grow to 40cm

Hairy Cat's Ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*)

INVASIVE

- Leaves are hairy, toothed or irregularly lobed, and are widest at their middles/tips
- Stems and leaves have a milky sap when broken
- Flowers are dandelion-like and yellow with green bracts
- Flowering stems are leafless and grow to 80cm



CONTACT INFORMATION

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www.reportaweedbc.ca

www.crd.bc.ca/invasive

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