

# Perennial sowthistle

*Sonchus arvensis* L.



## Life cycle

Erect, patch-forming perennial.

## Leaves

Seedling leaves initially develop from a basal rosette from a deep taproot. Lower leaves are alternate, blue-green, 4 to 12 inches long with two to five lobes with prickly teeth on each side, gradually becoming smaller toward the top with a clasping base. Leaves have a thickened midvein and exude a milky sap when damaged. Leaf midvein is not prickly underneath.



Perennial sowthistle plant.



Milky sap of perennial sowthistle.



Perennial sowthistle flower.

## Stems

Erect, herbaceous stem up to 5 feet tall that branches only near the flowers. Stems are hollow and smooth with ridges and exude a milky sap when damaged. Upper stems may have gland-tipped hairs.



Clasping leaf base of perennial sowthistle.

## Flowers and fruit

Bright yellow ray flowers are 1 to 2 inches wide and found in clustered heads. The seed is enclosed in a single-seeded, narrow, oval, reddish brown, ribbed, wind-disseminated fruit.

## Reproduction

Seeds and extensive creeping roots.

Lower leaf of perennial sowthistle.



## Perennial sowthistle

*Sonchus arvensis* L.



### Similar weeds

#### Annual sowthistle (*S. oleraceus* L.)

Differs by having an annual life cycle and a short taproot, less prickly leaf margins, and pale yellow, .5- to 1-inch-wide flower heads. Leaf midvein is not prickly underneath.

#### Prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola* L.)

Differs by having an annual or biennial life cycle; fine prickles on leaf margins and sharp prickles on the underside of the leaf midvein; and a many branched, spreading panicle with numerous pale yellow flower heads less than .5 inch wide.

#### Spiny sowthistle (*S. asper* [L.] Hill)

Differs by having an annual life cycle and short taproot, leaf margins with many sharp prickles, earlike lobes where the leaf attaches to the stem, and flower heads .5 to 1 inch wide. Leaf midvein is not prickly underneath.



Prickly lettuce rosette.



Sharp prickles on the underside of the leaf midvein of prickly lettuce.



Spiny sowthistle leaf.

**Asteraceae (Aster family)**