Bull thistle
*Cirsium vulgare* (Savi) Tenore

**Life cycle**
Erect, spiny biennial.

**Leaves**
First-year leaves originate from a basal rosette, followed by an erect, branched, flowering stem in the second year. Seedlings have egg- to spatula-shaped cotyledons and oval, oblong to spatula-shaped leaves with bumpy surfaces and marginal spines. Mature leaves are alternate, lance-shaped, deeply cut or lobed, with long, stiff spines. Leaves have coarse hairs above and soft, cottony hairs below.

**Stems**
Spiny-winged, hairy stems elongate during the

Bull thistle flower head.
Bull thistle *continued*

second year, often branched up to 7 feet tall.

**Flowers and fruit**
Red to purple, usually solitary flower heads consisting of only disk flowers are 1 to 2 inches wide and encircled by spine-tipped bracts. The seed is enclosed in a single-seeded, chili-pepper-shaped, wind-disseminated fruit.

**Reproduction**
Seeds.

Bull thistle seedling.

Bull thistle rosette.

*Asteraceae (Aster family)*
Bull thistle continued

Coarse hairs on the upper leaf surface of bull thistle.

Similar weeds

Canada thistle [C. arvense (L.) Scop.]
Differs by having a prolific, patch-forming perennial nature with a deep, creeping root system; leaves with smooth, dark green upper leaf surfaces and irregularly lobed to crinkled, spiny margins; and smaller (less than 1-inch-wide) pink to purple flower heads with spineless bracts.

Canada thistle plant.
Asteraceae (Aster family)

Bull thistle continued

Canada thistle flower head.

Canada thistle mature flower heads.