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Agriculture Protection Board
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PERENNIAL THISTLE



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1. Flower 2. Mature Plant 3. Infestation 4. Seedlings

(continued over)

PERENNIAL THISTLE (continued)

PERENNIAL thistle (*Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop.) also known as Canada thistle, Creeping thistle or Californian thistle, is a member of the Compositae. It is closely related to the familiar Spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*).

Occurrence:

Perennial thistle is a native of Europe, Asia and North Africa, but has been established as a major weed in North America since the eighteenth century. It is also established in New Zealand, Tasmania and Victoria. Outbreaks have been recorded at Geraldton in 1933 and later at Walpole. No plants have been found in W.A. for many years.

Perennial thistle is a declared plant (noxious weed) throughout Western Australia.

Significance:

Perennial thistle competes vigorously with crops and pastures for nutrients. It may also interfere

with crop harvesting.

Sheep forced to graze Perennial thistle may develop mouth infections from the sharp spines. Perennial thistle is one of the few weeds to have developed herbicide tolerance in some strains.

Description:

Perennial thistle has erect hairy grooved stems about 60cm to 1m high. The stems branch near the top. Leaves are green, hairless on the upper surface and downy hairy on the underside. They are lance-shaped and deeply lobed with frequent spines.

Flowers are reddish-violet and fragrant with a green calyx. Male and female flowers are found on separate plants. Numerous small rigid seeds are formed with a long pappus (parachute). The most obvious difference between Perennial thistle and Spear thistle is the extensive horizontal creeping root system of Perennial thistle.

Ecology:

Perennial thistle is a perennial plant reproducing from buds arising on the horizontal roots and from root fragments spread by cultivation. It may also be spread by seeds when fertilization has taken place. This can only occur when male and female plants grow reasonably close together. Seeds may be spread by wind or as a contaminant in pasture seeds. They may remain viable up to 20 years in the soil but seedlings are only established with difficulty. It is essential to prevent establishment of Perennial thistle in Western Australia.

For advice on Perennial thistle recognition and control contact the Agriculture Protection Board, telephone (09) 367 0111 or any country officer of the Agriculture Protection Board or the Department of Agriculture.