



**Box 1676  
Camrose, AB  
T4V 1X6  
(780) 678 6450  
[sales@scottsqqualitylawncare.ca](mailto:sales@scottsqqualitylawncare.ca)  
[scottsqqualitylawncare.ca](http://scottsqqualitylawncare.ca)**

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## HOW TO GET RID OF CANADA THISTLE



Thistles... They're a nuisance. They're prickly. They tend to come up where we don't want them to. And of course, the last place we want to have them appear is in our lawns that we spend so much time trying to maintain and keep healthy.

Let's take a closer look at this nefarious, invasive, and toxic weed. The fact is, despite its name, this variety of thistle is actually not from Canada. It is believed to have come from the eastern Mediterranean region and was likely one of the first weeds that early settlers brought to North America. The plant was called "Canada" thistle because early New England residents back in the 1600's blamed its emergence on French traders from Canada. However, historians believe it appeared in the United States and Canada around the same time. Its alternative name, "creeping thistle", is perhaps a more apt name.

It may indeed be one of the most noxious weeds around and has a reputation for being almost impossible to get rid of. Controlling Canada thistle isn't easy at all compared to the likes of dandelions or other more common weeds. It requires a significant amount of ongoing effort to be successful, but it will eventually pay off when you have a lawn or garden that is free from this annoying weed.

### CANADA THISTLE IDENTIFICATION

The fact is, there are many types of thistles and they all generally have lots in common. Not all varieties are harmful to your garden. For the purposes of this article, we're talking about our illustrious Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), one variety that is usually the most noxious and hard to get rid of.

Before you can carry out a treatment plan, you need to both be aware of what Canada thistle looks like and to confirm whether or not it is the weed you are dealing with.

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If you mis-identify it, you could end up using the wrong treatment methods, which can end up wasting your time and money. It's important that you differentiate Canada thistle, an aggressive perennial weed, from many of the biennial thistles that can grow since the methods of treating them are actually quite different.

While Canada thistle grows throughout much of Canada, this weed also thrives in most of the U.S. as well as Europe and Asia.

The plant does not tolerate very wet soil, and thrives on direct sunlight in open locations. It will grow happily and quickly on our lawns, in our gardens and flower beds, vacant lots and fields, and out in the wild on stream banks, roadsides, ditches, and hillsides, or in meadows, crop fields, pastures, grasslands and prairies, logged forests, and along fence lines and forest edges. Pervasive and insidious is what this thistle variety, most definitely, is.

Unlike some other insidious weeds, Canada thistle is actually quite easy to spot if you know what you're looking for, especially when it's in bloom. This weed, which can grow from 2 to 5 feet tall, has soft light green, deeply lobed, spear-shaped leaves that can be irregular from leaf to leaf, and have wavy spiny/toothed margins.

Sharp spines are numerous on the outer edges of the leaves, branches and main stem of the plant. However it's their prickly leaves with the sharp barbs or spines on them which we've all likely experienced when trying to grab one to pull it out and it's pricked us. They cause a somewhat painful irritating prick or sting so yes, we should have been wearing protective gloves.

Canada thistle flowers are also unique because they have both male and female flowers which are very small compared to other thistles. If allowed to go to flower, which is typically between June and October, it fancies up its appearance with small clusters of purple flowers in a pom-pom shape at the top of the plant. If the flower is allowed to go to seed, the flower will become white and fluffy, much like a dandelion seed head.

Seeds germinate beginning in late May through to autumn. A single plant can produce approximately 1,000 to 1,500 small light fluffy seeds which sounds like a lot and yet only about 10% of Canada thistles are spread through the seeds. The seeds are mainly dispersed by the wind, similar to dandelions, but can also be spread by animals, equipment, clothing, water and vehicles. The other 90% of new thistle shoots are spread via its deep roots which are the real issue and the way it multiplies itself.

Canada thistle thrives in a wide range of soil conditions, and below ground its creeping perennial roots are one key way to identify it. That's the biggest reason that Canada thistle has a reputation as a highly invasive, aggressive spreader. The plant develops an extensive root system that vigorously spreads both vertically and horizontally. If left unchecked, a single Canada thistle plant eventually turns into a patch containing what could literally be thousands of stems, believe it or not.

Its root system is an extensive system of rhizomes (underground stems) that readily shoot up with new shoots, invading new areas and out-competing other vegetation types. These root shoots start emerging from the soil around the middle of April, and continue to do so during the summer. The mature plant is typically anchored by a deep fibrous vertical tap root that can reach anywhere from 6 feet deep up to as much as 15 feet deep. The horizontal roots can spread out and grow as much as 10 to 20 feet within a year. This is what makes the Canada thistle especially difficult to control because you have to not only control the growing points in the plant that you see above ground but especially below ground as well. It's literally capable of producing up to 14 new shoots per square metre thanks to its rhizomes.

**NOTE:** So here's a key difference between it and most other weeds that you have to be mindful about --- If you till up the soil and break its rhizomes into pieces, they simply develop into new plants. In essence, you help them spread by doing this. Canada thistle can regenerate from tiny fragments that are able to survive in tough conditions for over 3 months. Even a piece of root measuring about half a centimeter can grow into a new plant, ready to cause problems in the spring.

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Once a population of Canada thistle takes root, it can be really hard to conquer. And being a perennial thistle variety, they come back each and every year, re-sprouting easily from even tiny sections of its fleshy roots, forming deeper and deeper root systems as it establishes itself and spreads out everywhere. Prevention and early treatment are key to eradicating this weed [More about that later].

## **SO IS CANADA THISTLE POISONOUS?**

Thistles are a noxious weed and while not particularly poisonous they can be somewhat harmful if they're touched or swallowed.

The seeds of Canada thistle and other thistles are a source of food for many songbirds, including Finchs, Siskins, Juncos, and most Sparrows, to name but a few.

The plants also produce nitrate, which apparently, can potentially be toxic to a horse if ingested in large quantities. Ironically though, cattle will readily eat thistles once they start. It makes for very good feed with 22% to 24% protein. Goats can also graze on it if the thistles are young... They'll eat the seedlings and help thin out any infestation. Goats are the most effective at grazing on it, but sheep, cattle, horses, donkeys, and llamas will also eat it.

That being said, none of this matters much to our residential lawns unless we live on a large acreage or farm and want to bring in some goats or other grazers to eat as much as they can to gain some degree of control over it... in which case, then try to bring them in during early Spring before the seeds start to spread. They'll chomp the seedlings down and keep them from flowering. Like mowing, you may have to allow your animals to graze multiple times throughout the year to keep the thistles from flowering.

## **HOW DO YOU CONTROL OR KILL CANADA THISTLE?**

As has already been mentioned, it's a tough weed to kill. Due to their extensive rhizome root system, there is no "one-application-and-done" method of Canada thistle eradication. It may even take you 2 or 3 growing seasons to eventually and completely get rid of them depending what measures you're utilizing. Whether you are controlling Canada thistle with chemicals or organically, you will likely need to do so repeatedly.

**There are numerous ways and means to control and/or prevent Canada thistle from taking root ---**

We'll first look at the DIY homemade methods that many people have utilized with various degrees of success. Then after that, we'll look at chemical weed killers which are perhaps most effective but not quite as available for use on our lawns.

Remember too that what may work well on one person's lawn may not work as well on someone else's. There are many factors to be considered for any approach or method you try. Plus, what you may do for getting rid of them in your lawn may be a little different than what farmers may employ on their fields on a much bigger scale. Also, in the case of chemical weed killers, remember that most of them are non-selective which means they will kill anything they're sprayed on, so much caution needs to be exercised.

**Sounds daunting, what can I do first?**

**PREVENTION IS KEY!**

**The first step towards getting rid of Canada thistle is making your lawn and garden less friendly to it ---**

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The following are some common-sense basics you can do in the course of your normal routine lawn care and maintenance:

- While Canada thistle will grow anywhere, it grows best in soil with low fertility and open areas, but improving your soil's fertility will weaken the Canada thistle and help desired plants grow better.
  - This will enable your desired plants and grass to be better able to compete with the Canada thistle.
  - We offer our clients an excellent all-natural soil enhancer product, "ENRICH", that will ensure your soil is healthy and nutrient-rich... It's the perfect food for your lawn and the soil underneath it, or for your gardens and flower beds, too.
  - Most weeds, even this noxious one, do not like competition from healthier plants or thick luscious lawns.
- Prevent new thistle invasion by keeping lawns thick; re-seed disturbed areas or any dried-out or dead lawn patches.
  - Keep lawns and gardens healthy and pest-free, and at the very least pull out any new thistle plants as soon as they appear before they start rooting deeply and spreading their rhizomes.
  - Timing is everything, starting early is a good thing!
- The best defense against Canada thistle is a thick lush lawn that is properly maintained and well-fed.
  - A thick, dense, well-fed lawn that is well-fertilized with a periodic fertilizer & weed control regimen (such as the 4 treatment program we offer here at Scott's Quality Lawn Care) will enable your lawn to be better able to choke out weeds and not allow them much room to establish.
- Mowing at a higher height of 3 to 4 inches can also discourage weed growth.
- Watering your grass deeply yet infrequently at the rate of 1 to 1½ inches per week will keep your grass healthier and deeply rooted thereby not giving much foothold for Canada thistle or other weeds to take root.
- In general, when either seeding a new lawn or reseeding to patch up your lawn, choose a turf grass that is dense and can help prevent the development of new weeds.

## **CONSIDER SOME DIY METHODS THAT MAY HELP CONTROL CANADA THISTLE ---**

All of the following may have some impact to varying degrees. How successful it may be depends upon a lot of factors such as how well-established is the thistle already or is it still young enough to not yet have deeply rooted itself. Killing the top of the plant may not be that difficult but doing only that doesn't necessarily kill the entire plant. What's below the ground is the hard part to kill.

I should also add that none of these are a "try this once and everything dies immediately" kind of solution. Also, be sure to watch for any unwanted side effects as you don't want to inadvertently cause some other problem to your lawn when using these. If in doubt, do a small "spot spray" test first before you start applying any of these anywhere on your grass that you may have a Canada thistle.

It can't hurt to try any of these DIY options repeatedly. It may be enough to kill your thistles over time. If not, try one of the other options if the previous one didn't garner you good enough results.

Most of these DIY options are for less severe thistle outbreaks, NOT for major Canada thistle infestations.

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED AS TO HOW TO GET RID OF THEM ---

### Will mowing get rid of thistles?

That would be great if it were that easy, but the answer is... Not really...

- Mowing would presumably cut the top of the thistle off, some of its leaves, etc., exposing the cut stem and weakening its ability to thrive, but due to its extensive rhizomes below ground, it's not apt to hinder it very much if it's mature and well-established.
  - Why? Because you've still left its main means to propagate and grow within the ground.
  - You may see that particular sprout seemingly die out if it was young, but mowing typically isn't a great deterrent or solution.
  - Plus if you tried to mow at a lower height to cut down more of the thistle, you'll negatively impact your lawn.
  - If it's a large infestation of thistles you'd also need multiple mows to attempt to get them under control but it's not likely going to be enough.
    - You'd have to catch them before they start flowering by mid-June or so.
    - And as the thistle regrows, you'll have to mow it again throughout the late summer to keep it from spreading seeds.
- After using your mower on thistles, be sure to inspect it carefully and clean it off.
  - If there are any seeds stuck to your mower, bag them and burn them.
  - You don't want to be spreading them to the rest of your lawn.

### Will boiling water kill thistles?

Be aware that boiling water is likely to kill any vegetation that it comes in contact with so this method should not be used if the Canada thistle has infested your lawn or some other area that already contains other plants or grass you want to keep.

- There are lots of things you can do to wilt and seemingly kill off the top of the plants, the leaves, etc. The question is whether it's going to do much damage to the rest of the root system???
- So that answer to this would be a partial yes, but inevitably, probably a no.

### Does baking soda kill thistles?

Yes, baking soda can kill just about any kind of common weeds by desiccating them, thereby forcing the leaves to dry up.

- The sodium bicarbonate draws away water from plant cells depriving them of the much-needed water for growth.
- Once again, the question is how far down into the root system will its impact reach? Probably not very far.

### Will ammonia kill thistles?

Ammonia can kill weeds.

- However, the problem is that it is non-selective at best and will kill all the vegetation it comes into contact with, too.
- Therefore, if you've got a nice lawn but for the weeds or desirable plants in your garden or flower beds, you may want to avoid using ammonia as a solution.

## Will vinegar kill thistles?

A homemade herbicide consisting of vinegar and salt can be effective at killing unwanted thistle plants.

- It would be a rather tedious job if it were an infestation, but if it's only a thistle here or there, this method has worked quite well for some people, especially for non-lawn applications.
  - I would caution you, however, if you're going to do this for thistles appearing on your lawn.
  - In that case, you would need to be very careful in how you apply the following spray solution... Don't be too liberal with it or inadvertently get it on your lawn or else you'll be killing your grass, too.
- There's no need to dilute the vinegar as that would only make it less efficient at killing weeds.
  - Ideally, the vinegar needs to contain at least 20% acetic acid to be effective at killing weeds.
    - With a 20% concentration it may take only 2 to 3 hours to kill the plant.
  - A typical bottle of household vinegar is about a 5% concentration.
    - The 5% concentration would have to be applied repeatedly to at least kill the thistle's top growth.
- Many people have found that filling a spray bottle with this type of vinegar plus a few tablespoons of table salt can make an effective homemade thistle herbicide ---
  - First, you cut off the plant at the base of the stem.
  - Spray 1 or 2 sprays of the solution directly on the cut of each thistle plant.
    - The cut allows the vinegar to spread to the roots more quickly, which in turn helps kills the plant more quickly.
  - Do not spray the soil with vinegar.
  - Sprinkle a pinch of salt at the base of each plant, too.
    - Salt dehydrates the plants which makes them die even faster.
    - Be mindful that too much salt will lower the quality of your soil (or kill your grass if you're spraying thistles there), so use no more than a pinch of salt for each plant.
  - After the plant withers and browns, removing it from the ground, roots and all, should be relatively easy to do, especially if it wasn't a fully mature, well-established plant.
  - Saturating these unwanted weeds once a week with this mixture helps control the problem.
  - Be very cautious about spraying other plants you would like to keep, with this mixture, because it may kill them as well.

## What about lemon juice?

Some people claim the following works quite well, too. This DIY weed killer mixture is a combination of lemon juice and vinegar as follows ---

- The lemon juice acts similarly to vinegar when it comes to killing weeds.
  - The high acidic level breaks down the composition of the plant, drying it out and preventing it from retaining moisture.
  - Apply it on a hot, sunny day and it will work even better.
- Add ½ cup of lemon juice and 1 liter of white vinegar into a large empty spray bottle.
  - If you don't have a spray bottle large enough, mix the vinegar and lemon juice in a blender and then pour the contents into your spray bottle as needed.
- As per the vinegar and salt method above, likewise do the same for the lemon juice and vinegar solution ---
  - First, cut off the plant at the base of the stem.
  - Spray 1 or 2 sprays of the solution directly on the cut of each thistle plant.
    - The cut allows the lemon juice and vinegar solution to spread to the roots more quickly, which in turn helps kills the plant more quickly.
  - Do not spray the soil.

- After the plant withers and browns, removing it from the ground, roots and all, should be relatively easy to do, especially if it wasn't a fully mature, well-established plant.
- Saturating the unwanted plants once a week with this mixture helps control the problem.
- Be very cautious about spraying other plants you would like to keep, with this mixture, because it may kill them as well.

### **Will bleach kill thistles?**

Yes and no...

- Bleach can be effective in "spot killing" individual thistles but not for a large batch of them.
- You have to be careful though as it raises the pH level of the soil so high that it might be difficult to grow plants in the same location afterward.
- Bleach is NOT a good choice if the thistle is growing within your lawn or next to other desired plants.

### **Is it enough to simply cut back my thistles?**

There's an old rhyme that says, "Cut thistles in May, they'll grow in a day; Cut them in June, that is too soon; Cut them in July, then they will die".

- I'm not so sure that's an accurate observation of the life cycle of Canada thistle, but it hints at being partially correct minus the other details, though typically "cutting them back" (with pruning shears to ground level) isn't a foolproof solution.
- The plant is not dead and is more likely to recover or simply shoot up elsewhere.
- If it was a good method, we'd all be doing that and no one would be complaining about thistles returning or still rearing their heads elsewhere.

### **Is it enough to pull out, dig up, or uproot my thistles?**

The assumption firstly is that you're routinely inspecting your lawn and your gardens for any signs of this unwelcome guest so you can take immediate action when needed. Perhaps you're already doing this with dandelions. This noxious weed, also sometimes called the "lettuce-from-hell thistle" because of its habit of coming back time and again, can be eventually successfully controlled ---

- It's just going to take persistence and ongoing repeated efforts, at least enough efforts so that it doesn't become a thistle infestation and they're appearing fewer and farther between, so to speak.
- Remember what was mentioned before though: Don't attempt to pull these weeds out by hand once they're well-established.
  - Their rhizomes will simply spawn new plants when broken, causing the root system to spread out and grow even more.
- For younger thistles early in the season or ones that aren't yet flowering, you can put on some heavy, leather gloves and gently tug the entire plant upward by the stem.
  - Thistles have sharp prickles, so make sure you've covered any exposed skin to prevent injury, not just gloves, but some long pants, too, so that you don't scratch your legs whilst pulling them out.
  - Use a trowel to help you dig up these young ones.
  - Due to their widely spreading rhizome system, try to uproot as much as you can of their entire root network as you pull them out.
    - Their roots are strong and resistant, so it is best to first loosen the root system by digging around the plant.
  - Since mature plants have root systems that can extend for 10 to 15 feet, you will have better luck pulling up immature plants.

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**REMEMBER:** I can't stress it enough... Make sure every part of the root is fully removed. If even a tiny piece of the root survives, a new thistle plant will develop, and the whole plant life cycle can start over again. Don't let thistles get to the stage in which the stems elongate and begin to produce flowers. At that point, thistles will have the clear advantage.

**REMEMBER:** If the thistle is already flowering, pulling it out will only spread the seeds, so you should pick a different method. If you pull the thistle out and it doesn't have any flowers on it, it's okay to throw the stems in with your compost pile or yard debris bin. If you accidentally pull out a thistle that has flowers on it, bag it and burn it in your fire pit. Flowering thistles can spread seeds even if they aren't in the ground.

### **What about deep-tilling or roto-tilling to destroy the thistle's roots?**

Again, depending on how early you're attempting this in the season and the maturity of the plant, deep tilling will destroy the thistle's roots, at least those in comes in substantial contact with.

- Obviously you can't do this on your lawn.
- But for a garden or flower bed, use either a hoe (or garden tiller if you haven't yet planted anything else in it) to till the soil at least 6 to 8 inches depth (of course, the deeper, the better), and remove the majority of the thistle and its roots.
- It's important to till as far down as you can.
  - Shallow tilling will actually encourage the spread of Canadian thistle.
  - As alluded to above this is only going to work on young plants that aren't flowering yet, so try this out on young, thin patches.
- After tilling thistle-infested areas, clean your equipment to prevent it from carrying root fragments into clean areas.
- On its own, tilling isn't a very effective method.
  - It works best when you follow up with a herbicide application.

### **Here's another approach I know of someone taking that worked quite effectively for them -**

Consider what this family did but on a smaller scale, should it help you with your thistle problem. Granted, you wouldn't want to be doing this for your lawn in the city, unless you were totally redoing it due to whatever severe problems you may have had that couldn't be solved any other way. However, I suspect it could work for a smaller area or a garden, etc.

Their situation was indeed a very serious one... an infestation that was allowed to get way out of control.

They lived on an small acreage and their back yard was essentially a field of native prairie grasses, weeds and wild flowers, but totally infested with Canada thistles. Here and there over the last few years they tried all the DIY methods already mentioned but none of them did enough. The thistles just kept growing like crazy no matter what and they essentially gave up on it.

As they well knew, their thistles had been far too well-established for far too many years already. It was late summer and they finally decided they'd had enough of the problem. They wanted to do something once and for all to get rid of them and reclaim their back yard. They wanted to get a fresh start by killing off all the thistles and weeds, literally everything, and then re-landscaping the next Spring.

They didn't want to use any chemical herbicides so they modified a few methods we've already discussed as follows:

- They rented a heavy duty roto-tiller and tilled up the entire backyard to a depth of 12 to 18 inches or so.

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- They tilled and turned that soil over & over to where apart from the obvious clumps of vegetation mulch and dug up roots (many of them from the uprooted thistles which they gathered up and removed), the rest was actually some very fertile soil that would be ideal for the grass they planned to plant next Spring, along with a garden.
- They never realized just how healthy the soil underneath their backyard really was.
- They let it settle for a day before any rains might come but planned to cover it over with tarps for awhile.
- Any plants (whether desirable ones like your grass or garden plants or flowers, etc., including thistles or weeds) don't grow well if they don't have light and air.
  - They literally covered over their entire tilled-up backyard with a bunch of heavy duty dark-coloured tarps.
  - They weighted them down with some boards and whatnot so that any severe winds wouldn't blow them off or move them.
  - If the tilled soil underneath managed to get any moisture at all it would only be from any rainfall that might accumulate on top of the tarp and possibly seep through its seams to below.
- They literally "baked to death/starved to death" under the heat of the sun, lack of light, lack of oxygen, and lack of proper watering, whatever remnants of plant life may have been attempting to recover under those tarps.
  - It pretty much killed everything within a few weeks, but they left the tarps laying there as Fall came fast that year and Winter sooner than normal.
  - They took a chance that it would be okay to leave the tarps there through the winter months.
- To make a long story short, the next year once the snow was all melted, they removed the tarps, did another roto-tilling of the soil to mix things up a bit and refresh it, and to let it get some crucial air, rain and sunlight.
  - They added an application of soil enhancer plus spread some compost and peat moss onto it, to add some nutrients back to the soil.
  - They did some landscaping to level it all out and prepare it for what they planned to do for their backyard.
  - Most of it was seeded as new lawn, and a small portion was made into a garden.
- As the end results of those efforts, the difference was dramatic...
  - They had no weeds somehow trying to grow under those tarps, there wasn't even any mole holes or vole trails under the tarps as there probably wasn't enough nutrients or food for any rodents to attempt to forage under there.
  - Whatever there might have previously been for Canada thistle rhizomes under the ground never resurfaced or grew anymore.
  - Of course, all soil will eventually take on some air-borne weeds which could be easily dealt with but GONE WERE THE CANADA THISTLES ENTIRELY!
- Once their grass grew in well, they barely had any weed problems to contend with at all.
  - They regularly fertilized that and now you'd never know that their backyard was the previous eye-sore that it had been.

I wanted to mention what this family did for their "extreme infestation" as it makes perfect sense. For a large yard that they wanted to get a fresh start on, it was probably the best and most thorough approach to getting it back in shape again. It took some time but what they did worked very well for them.

You can of course, do something like this on a smaller scale if you've tried the other DIY approaches and they simply haven't done enough, and your situation perhaps warrants this extreme measure. That's your call, so to speak.

This is also an example of the lesson to be learned when you don't "nip something in the bud" but let it grow to become an almost insurmountable problem. They were lucky that this common-sense approach worked as well as it did.

As I mentioned previously, I guess the word to the wise would be... **Prevention is key! Don't wait till you have a serious infestation - address it as it happens.**

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**The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get rid of the problem. Prevention is always about thinking ahead and being proactive. In the case of thistles, if you wait till they're starting to appear everywhere, you've likely already waited too long.**

### **SOME DIY METHODS RELATED TO THE ABOVE THAT CAN WORK WELL TO PREVENT SMALLER OR LESSER EXTREME CANADA THISTLE INFESTATIONS FROM COMING BACK AGAIN ---**

- Once thistles have been killed or removed from your lawn or garden, use a few of the previously mentioned homemade prevention methods to keep it from coming back.
  - Check it regularly and address any new re-occurrences the moment you notice them.
- Weeds won't grow if they don't have light, so where applicable, like in a garden, block the problem areas with some type of homemade mulch to cover the soil around the plants.
  - You can buy mulch anywhere, but many household items can be re-purposed and work as well as a mulch, too, such as newspaper or lightweight cardboard.
  - Many an organic gardener will choose to use that as opposed to the bagged coloured mulch you can buy at garden centers and nurseries.
  - It will work just as well if not better.
  - I have noticed from personal experiences that thistles can find their way up through even the store-bought mulch I spread around some of my younger spruce trees.
    - However, when I laid down some light cardboard with the mulch on top I never had any weeds appearing anymore.
  - Garden waste, such as pine needles and wood chips, can also work well for mulching, but keep an eye on pH levels from any materials you add on top of your soil. Also be careful not to put too much down wherein that starts to smother what's below that you do want to grow.

## **CHEMICAL WEED KILLERS**

**Firstly, let it be stated clearly that chemical control products or chemical weed-killers should only be used as a last resort, as organic approaches are more environmentally friendly.**

As mentioned before, it's a question of how severe is your thistle problem... Do you have them only here and there starting to appear? Or is it already an infestation of thistles? And have you already tried the DIY methods but aren't getting the results you hoped for? If you've run out of those options, then it may be time to consider the chemical herbicides.

**There's no doubt that Canada thistle can be killed with chemical weed killers. Unfortunately, there are very few choices for chemical thistle killers that can be purchased retail or that are specifically designed for lawns and selective enough to address the challenging issues with Canada thistle.**

Some of these can work very well for spot spraying though most are better suited for larger field applications. Presumably, they might work well for large acreage lawns, too. Some of the following are sold retail, wherein a residential property owner could buy and use it for their lawn or garden, and some are only sold commercially to farmers and acreage owners or licensed applicators. Some may even require a licensed applicator to apply them. There are pros and cons to these in that sense.

However, generally speaking, these solutions, are more effective, though NONE OF THEM are an "apply once and the thistles are gone forever" solution. Most require repeated applications. As I've said before, it's very difficult to get rid of Canada thistle, whether that's in your lawn or garden, or likewise in a farmer's field of crops or his pastures where his cows are grazing. I'm repeating myself but it can be done but prevention is always key, and the better proactive approach to take. However, factor in that it's going to take some time, effort and expense to rid yourself of this noxious weed unless you've caught it while young before it's had much chance to develop its extensive underground rhizome network.

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\* Firstly, let it be said that most lawn care companies offer some kind of fertilizer and weed control options. At Scott's Quality Lawn Care, ours is a "weed & feed" like combination of liquid broadleaf weed contact herbicide and liquid fertilizer.

Yes, Canada thistle is a broadleaf weed. However, they're a different breed of that, you could say.

At best, the typical herbicide offered by lawn care companies, may only wilt the thistle's leaves, making you think it's dying. But then within a few days to a week, it may bounce back and recover. Why? Because it's simply not a high enough concentration nor selective enough for thistles, to reach down in sufficient quantity into their extensive root system. It may even kill off the top of the plant but the plant is still there under the ground and will rear its head there afresh or sprout up elsewhere thanks to its rhizomes' new sprouts. The problem is not the broad-based broadleaf weed herbicide... It's the thistles thanks to the rhizomes. Sadly, there's nothing in the marketplace that is selective enough and effective enough to kill thistles in one spray. It simply doesn't exist anywhere unless you want to kill everything else for adjacent vegetation, too.

That's precisely why lawn care companies will always accurately tell you that prevention is the best medicine. It's not an excuse... it's a truth --- We can't say it enough... If you keep your lawn healthy, lush and vibrant, it's not apt to give much foothold for thistles or other weeds to grow. Weeds don't like competition from healthy grass or plants. The fact is, sadly, the only clients we have that may occasionally encounter severe thistle problems are those that do not routinely care for and maintain their lawns as much as they should. Therefore their grass is thinner, not as healthy, and is more susceptible to the encroachment of such weeds, or for that matter, other lawn fungal diseases, too.

### **LET'S CONSIDER THE VARIOUS OPTIONS ---**

It would be far too much detail so I'm not going to get into specific chemical ingredients or application rates or procedures as each chemical product may have it's own unique specs as to how to best apply it and when, etc. That info is all on their product labels and manufacturers' websites.

Some herbicides contain potentially dangerous chemicals that may cause irritation. Always heed any warnings for any herbicides you use. Needless to say, always wear gloves & eye protection to stay safe, too.

That being said, I will mention some known products that have proven to be effective by its users. Some are readily available whereas some are difficult to source locally. Some countries also have more stringent guidelines and laws prohibiting the use of some types of chemicals and formulations of some chemical weed-killers, too. Canada for example, doesn't allow the use of certain herbicide formulations that are readily available and in wide-spread usage in the U.S.

So do your own due diligence if you're planning to buy and utilize one of these as your thistle killer. Choose what you believe will work the best for you and always, consider what is safest to use in your situation. As I said, there are pros and cons to everything, so duly consider everything.

The following products are listed in no particular order. We can't personally vouch for any of these based on personal experience, though information online and from other knowledgeable experts in the field recommends the following products depending upon particulars of the application and other very important factors. As I said, if you're considering using any of the following, be sure to educate yourself, ask lots of questions, and be sure that it is indeed the right product for you and your particular thistle problem.

**Remember that some of these MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO BE APPLIED DIRECTLY ONTO YOUR LAWN as it may adversely affect your lawn. Some of them will be okay, such as Par III or Killlex. So, be sure it's something made for addressing thistle problems on your lawn without any negative side effects.**

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Spot spraying as opposed to broadcast spraying may be one way to carefully apply it onto thistles already present within your lawn. But that decision is entirely up to you. If in doubt, be sure to learn all you can before using any chemical weed killer.

#### **Par III Turf Herbicide -**

- Par III is specially formulated for hard-to-kill weeds in turf grass such as that found in parks, lawns, golf courses, etc.
- This product is only effective when applied to the leaves of actively growing broadleaf weeds.
- If targeting thistles - a more concentrated mixture is specified and should be followed.
  - **NOTE:** Test a small area or a few thistles first to see if the higher concentration is going have any negative effects on the grass the thistle is residing within, just to be safe.
- This product is designed for target treatment of weedy areas of lawns.
- If weed populations do not warrant a broadcast application (e.g., entire lawn), consider spot treatments that target only the weedy areas as we're suggesting for thistles.

#### **Killex -**

- A very similar product to Par III is Killex which is a broadleaf weed killer available in retail outlets, garden centers, etc.
- Its formulation essentially comprises the same ingredients as Par III but in different concentrations.
- It can be purchased in a spray bottle in a diluted form, or as a stronger liquid concentrate in a refill bottle.
- Follow their product label directions but given that it's a stronger concentration, consider experimenting/testing a bit, especially in the case of hard to get rid of broadleaf weeds like Canada thistle.
  - In that way you can perhaps come up with the perfect ratio of concentrate to water that will kill your particular maturity of thistles but not harm your particular turf grass.
  - I've personally done some experimenting with this on my own acreage lawn with good success in eliminating thistles.

**\* THE FOLLOWING PRODUCTS ARE PRIMARILY MEANT FOR USE ON FARMER'S CROPS, ETC., NOT RESIDENTIAL LAWNS. HOWEVER, SOME PEOPLE HAVE CAREFULLY USED THEM ON THEIR LAWNS WITH GOOD SUCCESS.**

The major caveat is going to, of course be, that these weren't designed for lawns but might work okay. They're also typically only available to farmers and acreage owners in large size quantities. There are no retail-sized versions of these available normally. So you're on your own if you go with any of the following thistle killers... Experiment first just to be sure.

#### **2,4-D Amine Selective Weed Killer -**

- This herbicide is easy to use and is selective so it's designed to only target the problem weed and leave your desired plants unharmed.
- Because Canada thistle is so prolific, you may need to do repeated applications until you no longer see any more Canada thistle.
  - Check back weekly and spot spray as necessary.

**\* I was recently talking to someone quite knowledgeable from Wetaskiwin Co-op Agro Centre about getting rid of thistles. He recommended the following three choices that he said were quite effective ---**

They were designed specifically for crop usage but he believed they should be just as effective if carefully spot-sprayed on thistles. He wasn't sure about the impact on lawns directly if you were simply broadcast spraying the entire lawn area. Obviously scale down the application rates accordingly as per the instructions on the product. Do some experimenting on a few thistles first before proceeding.

Please note that these are also effective on other broadleaf weeds, too, which will be noted on the product. In that sense, they may not only kill off your thistles, but also some of the other broadleaf weeds you may have that you'd like to get rid of, too.

#### **Restore II -**

- Restore II is a systemic, post-emergence broadleaf herbicide designed for the management of a broad spectrum of broadleaf weeds and invasive species in rangeland and permanent grass pastures.
- With Restore II, you target application timing to the most problematic weed.
  - If your primary target is Canada thistle, wait long enough for the majority of thistles to emerge and be actively growing but prior to flowering (July 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>).
- Restore II controls weeds and root systems that are present at the time of application; weeds that have not emerged will not have the same level of control.
- Apparently has excellent residual impact, lasting for up to 3 years.

#### **Ally -**

- Ally is a non-selective herbicide that quickly kills weeds to the roots and offers a safer alternative to glyphosate.
- Is similar to Restore 2 though not quite as long lasting
- You have to apply this to fully-grown ready to flower plants so that it can affect more of the entire plant above ground and thereafter reaches through that to the roots below.

#### **Curtail M -**

- Curtail M is deemed to be one of the best thistle control products.
- With two active ingredients, Curtail M translocates deep down to the extensive thistle roots for effective above and below ground control.
- This can be applied at any stage but may have to be reapplied a couple times a year or often as needed.
- Curtail M can't be bought in smaller retail size; it can only be bought by farmers or acreage owners who have a blue rural address sign on their property.
- Though Curtail M is not registered for use in landscaping or on turfgrass or lawn, some people have used it there with great success.

#### **TO SUM UP...**

**The key takeaway... As I mentioned previously, PREVENTION IS KEY!**

**Don't make the mistake of waiting till you have a serious infestation of Canada thistle. Address it as it happens. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get rid of the problem. Prevention is always about thinking ahead and being proactive. In the case of thistles, if you wait till they're starting to appear everywhere, you've likely already waited too long, and now you've got some very challenging work cut out for you. I hope this article has offered some good advice should you have a Canada thistle problem. Don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions or we can help you further.**

**Good luck to you!**

**...SEE NEXT PAGE...**

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**\*\*\* SPECIAL NOTE \*\*\***

*We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.*

*If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...*

*Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.*

*These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.*

*You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...*

From Our "**PROACTIVE LAWN CARE**" Series Of Articles —

*7 Steps To A Great Lawn*

*Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter*

*Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions*

From Our "**WHAT YOU'RE NOT TOLD**" Series Of Articles —

*What You're Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives*

*What You're Not Told About Bats & Their Guano*

From Our "**WHY?**" Series Of Articles —

*Why Is My Grass So Thin?*

*Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?*

*Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?*

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*How To Get Rid of Ants*

*How To Get Rid of Dew Worms*

*How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings*

*How To Get Rid of Quackgrass*

*How To Get Rid of Thistles*

From Our "**DAMAGE BY DOGS & OTHER CRITTERS**" Series of Articles —

*Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots*

*Damage Caused by Voles*

...See more on next page...

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From Our **“SEEDING LAWNS”** Series Of Articles —

*Grass Seeding For New Lawns*  
*Overseeding For Existing Lawns*

From Our **“DIY”** Series Of Articles —

*DIY\_Alternate Ways To Remove Weeds In Gravel Areas*

From Our **“COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES”** Series Of Articles —

*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases (Compendium Of All Common Ones)*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_The Usual Causes*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Snow Mold*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Leaf Spot & Melting Out*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Brown Patch*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Summer Patch*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Pythium Blight*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Red Thread*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Rust Diseases*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Powdery Mildew*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Dollar Spot*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Fairy Ring*

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## **INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —**

### **FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:**

*Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program*  
*Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds*  
*Ten Reasons Our Program is Different*

### **ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:**

*Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program*  
*Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels*

### **WEEKLY MOWING:**

*How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works*  
*Our Quality Control Program*  
*Ten Reasons We Are Different*

### **CORE AERATION:**

*Why Aerate Your Lawn?*

### **POWER RAKING:**

*Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?*

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