



OTHER COMMON NAMES: spreading knapweed, tumble knapweed, white knapweed

OTHER Knapweed SPECIES

Russian Knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), Meadow Knapweed (*Centaurea pratensis*), Squarrose Knapweed (*Centaurea virgata*)

DESCRIPTION

Diffuse knapweed can be found as a rosette, or with erect flowering stems to three feet tall. Its stems typically have many branches, with short, stiff hairs on its branch axils (where the branches arise?). Diffuse knapweed has both long, deciduous basal leaves that are stalked and divided into narrow, hairy segments, and smaller stem leaves which are alternate, less divided, stalkless, and become bract-like near the flower clusters. Flower heads are urn-shaped and grow singularly or in clusters of two to three at the ends of the branches. The bracts surrounding the flower heads are yellowish with a brownish margin, sometimes spotted, fringed on the sides, and terminate into a slender bristle or spine. Flowers can be white, rose-purple, to lavender in color.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ALL Knapweeds

- urn-shaped flower heads
- bristly/fringed bracts below the flower heads

WHEN TO FIND DIFFUSE Knapweed

In fall and winter, it will be found as basal a rosette. It bolts in May, and flowers from June until August.

WHERE TO FIND DIFFUSE Knapweed

Like all knapweed species, it prefers open habitats such as plains, rangelands, riparian areas, sandy river shores, gravel banks, rock outcrops, roadsides and forested benchlands.

WHAT TO DO

Hand pull or grub this plant only if it is a small infestation and you are certain of its identification. Bag and remove material from the site, being careful not to disperse seeds.

Diffuse Knapweed

and other problematic knapweeds

Centaurea diffusa

Diffuse knapweed is native to the Balkan region, and is believed to be introduced through impure imported alfalfa. Now it is established in nineteen states. In Oregon, it is abundant in the Northeast along the Columbia Gorge and in the Blue Mountains ecoregion.

Diffuse knapweed reproduces and spreads by seed. Seeds are carried by the wind, or dispersed when a flower head breaks off and becomes a tumble weed, subsequently spreading seeds over longer distances. Diffuse knapweed initially forms a basal rosette, and can remain as such for up to several years, depending on environmental conditions. After it reaches a certain threshold size, it will bolt, flower, set seed, and die.

Expansive monocultures of diffuse knapweed decrease forage for wildlife and increase soil erosion. Diffuse knapweed excludes important native plant communities by producing the allelopathic chemical cninclin, which can suppress the growth of other species. The most effective means of control is to prevent establishment.

Diffuse knapweed is just one of five species in the knapweed complex that threaten to invade Tom McCall Preserve. A sixth knapweed-like species, bachelor's button, is already too abundant at Tom McCall Preserve to be controlled through early detection. Bachelor's button can be distinguished from other knapweeds by its bracts, which are not spine tipped. Also its flowers are generally blue-purple in color, and there are small fuzzy hairs on the stems and leaves. **Please report any knapweed-like species you see except bachelor's button.**

REFERENCE

Carpenter, Alan T. and Thomas A. Murray. *Element Stewardship Abstract for Centaurea diffusa Lamarck, diffuse knapweed*. The Nature Conservancy. 2002.



Diffuse knapweed rosette. Photo by Dan Sharratt, ODA Plant Division

This fact sheet was produced by The Nature Conservancy in Oregon's Weed Watcher – Weed Buster Program.