

# Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area

*Working together to protect the northwoods of Wisconsin  
from the impacts of invasive species*

Issue No 7 - April 2011

## **A Thistle By Any Other Name...**

*Biennial or Perennial? Native or Invasive?  
Get a grip on those pesky purple thistles on  
Page 2*



## **New Weeds on the Block**

*Get to know these outsiders before they show  
up on your doorstep - or landscape, as it were.  
Matt Bushman, USFS Botanist, introduces  
us to four up-and-coming invasive plants  
Page 4-5*

## **Garlic Mustard Update: Page 3**

**If you can't beat it,**

**Eat it!**

## **A new culinary trend sweeps the nation**

We have all heard the term "locavore" referring to eating locally-produced food. Now you can become an "invasivore" - eating the stuff that shouldn't be there.

Before you think this is just a passing fad, consider that many invasive species were originally designed for cultivation, and several specifically for food or medicinal reasons.

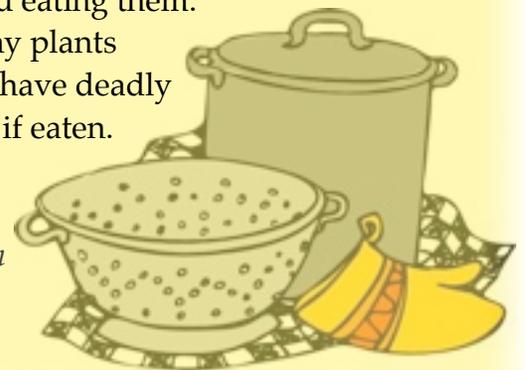
Pesto made with garlic mustard is a zingy favorite and recipes abound all over the web. However, many of our other "weeds" are

quite edible. Dandelion greens are great in a salad or sauté. Sheep sorrel has a lovely lemony flavor and purslane was one of Gandhi's favorite vegetables. Many other garden weeds such as chickweed, curly dock and lamb's quarters are not only edible, but very nutritious as well. If you are up for challenging your taste buds, check out [www.wildmanstevebrill.com](http://www.wildmanstevebrill.com) for more information and recipes.

One caveat: make sure you are able to positively identify these species before harvesting and eating them.

There are many plants out there that have deadly consequences if eaten.

*Thanks to  
Carmen Chapin  
for this savory  
submission.*



# A thistle

by any other name...

A thistle's a thistle, right? And all thistles are bad, right? Thistles have a bad reputation, and often it is well deserved. Species like Canada thistle, European marsh thistle and bull thistle are highly invasive. However, some thistles are native to Wisconsin, and others – such as the federally threatened dune thistle and state threatened Hill's thistle – are quite rare. In all, Wisconsin has 10 thistle species and numerous other “thistle-like” plants (such as sow-thistle, teasel, globe-thistle, star thistle, and others). Here are some key ways to tell the invaders from the natives.

Native to Wisconsin	Non-Native & Highly Invasive
Tall thistle ( <i>Cirsium altissimum</i> )	Canada thistle ( <i>Cirsium arvense</i> )
Prairie thistle ( <i>Cirsium discolor</i> )	European marsh thistle ( <i>Cirsium palustre</i> )
Hill's thistle ( <i>Cirsium hillii</i> )	Bull thistle ( <i>Cirsium vulgare</i> )
Marsh thistle ( <i>Cirsium muticum</i> )	<b>Native to western US/Adventive but not invasive in WI</b>
Dune thistle ( <i>Cirsium pitcherii</i> )	Flodman's thistle ( <i>Cirsium flodmanii</i> )
	Wavy-leaved thistle ( <i>Cirsium undulatum</i> )



**Canada thistle** (*Cirsium arvense*) is a perennial that spreads by seed and from creeping underground rhizomes, forming large, dense colonies of plants. Leaves are wavy, lobed, and as the plant matures, the lobes become triangular-shaped. The upper surface of the leaf blade is smooth while the underside of the blade may or may not be hairy. Canada thistle's small flowers are produced in terminal clusters and are usually pinkish-purple in color (rarely white). Canada thistle is found throughout the CWMA in both disturbed and undisturbed habitats.

**European marsh thistle** (*Cirsium palustre*) grows 4–5 feet tall and is primarily found in wet areas. Leaves in first-year rosettes are spiny, long, deeply lobed and hairy on the underside. On flowering plants, leaves are 6–8 inches long near the base and shorter toward the top. Flowering stems are erect, thick, branched at the top and bristling with spiny vertical "wings." Clusters of spiny purple flower heads bloom June–July and by late summer produce tiny seeds attached to feathery "thistle-down." To date, this plant is known only from central Iron County.



**Bull thistle** (*Cirsium vulgare*) leaves become elongated as the plant matures, and each lobe and leaf terminal is tipped with a long, stiff spine. Hairs may be found on both the upper and lower surfaces of the leaves. Leaves become progressively smaller in the terminal portion of the plant's second-year growth, although the spines are longer compared with those on the lower leaves. Flower heads are large (1 ½ inch) and deep purple. Bull thistle is one of the most commonly occurring thistles in the state and is present throughout the CWMA in pastures, roadsides, open shorelines, and shaded forest roads.

## Thistles (from page 2)

In general terms, those are the three thistles that we need to be concerned about in the Lake Superior region. Hill's thistle and dune thistle are both rare and typically occur outside of our CWMA area.

Tall thistle and prairie thistle appear similar and to the untrained eye look a lot like Canada thistle. A quick guide is to take a look at the **underside** of the leaf (careful of those spines!). Canada thistle can be smooth or hairy but will typically appear green (if hairy, you can still see the green beneath). Tall and prairie thistles are both densely hairy (tomentose) beneath and appear whitish, their green surface being fully hidden by the fine hairs.



European swamp thistle and the native marsh thistle grow in similar habitats. The native is a desirable plant that provides an important nectar source for bumble bees while the invader is a serious problem in wetlands. Luckily, they have a key difference that easily distinguishes them in the field. European swamp thistle has extremely spiny, winged stems while the native marsh thistle is weakly spiny and without wings.

For more information, visit the UW Herbarium at <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/>.

## UPDATE: GARLIC MUSTARD

Last year at this time, we featured an article on garlic mustard. This innocuous-looking plant has decimated forests in southern Wisconsin. In recent years, it has been found in the following locations in the NCWMA area:

- along the **Montreal River at Hwy 2** - found in 2009, being treated this year with herbicide and hand-pulling
- along the **Bad River in Mellen** - found in 2007, treated annually since then using herbicide, weed torch, and hand-pulling
- isolated spots in **Ashland** - all small patches (a few plants), all hand-pulled and seemingly eradicated
- and several locations in the **Glidden District** of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest - being managed with herbicide, weed torch, and hand-pulling

You can help protect our forests from garlic mustard by learning to identify it. When an infestation is caught early, it is possible to eradicate it by simply hand-pulling each plant, and monitoring for seedlings. Look for violet-shaped, crinkly leaves in a rosette, or spade-shaped leaves on second-year shoots. Leaves will smell like garlic when crushed. White flowers have four petals. This plant is one of the first to turn green and start growing in spring. For more tips on identification, check out last year's newsletter at [www.northwoodscwma.org](http://www.northwoodscwma.org).



# New Weeds on the Block

Imagine if we had caught purple loosestrife when it first appeared. How easy would it have been to control? With these four invasive plants, we may still have that chance. They are new to the Lake Superior region. Learn to recognize them and help us stop them in their tracks!



Wild parsnip. Photo by Kitty Kohout.  
UW-Stevens Point Herbarium

**Wild parsnip** (*Pastinaca sativa*) is an aggressive member of the parsley family that invades sunny disturbed areas. The flowers are small, yellow and arranged in an umbel (like an umbrella), with leaves that are alternate and pinnately compound (branching from a main vein, somewhat like a fern). Wild parsnip looks similar to golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*) and cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*), but golden Alexander is smaller and cow parsnip has white flowers. The taproot of this Eurasian native is edible, but the juice contained in the above-ground portion of the plant can cause a significant burn when it comes in contact with the skin in the presence of sunlight. Avoid this plant unless you are wearing protective wear. Wild parsnip has been in the Lake Superior region for a few years, but has been spreading rapidly in recent years. It is more common in southern Wisconsin, but has been found in Ashland, Bayfield, and Douglas counties. Control methods for wild parsnip include: cutting the root with a shovel 1–2 inches below ground prior to flowering, pulling the plant out of the ground, or using an herbicide such as glyphosate or metsulfuron-methyl with a surfactant.

**Field scabiosa** (*Knautia arvensis*) is from Eurasia, but has become established across Canada and the northern U.S. The plant is approximately 1 foot tall with hairy, toothed leaves and lilac purple flowers. According to the UW-Stevens Point herbarium website, this plant occurs in Ashland, Bayfield, and Sawyer counties in northern Wisconsin, and only Dane county in the southern portion of the state. Field scabiosa is common along roadsides and other open areas with disturbed soil. Hand pulling is the most effective method for controlling this plant.



Field scabiosa.  
Photos by  
Steve Garske.  
UW-Stevens Point Herbarium



# New Weeds on the Block

## (continued)



Garden valerian.  
Photo by Paul Berry.  
UW-Stevens Point Herbarium

**Garden valerian** (*Valeriana officinalis*) is a perennial plant that is native to Eurasia and is sometimes planted as an ornamental or used for herbal/medicinal purposes. The plant is typically 2–3 feet tall with a large white flower cluster and leaves that are opposite and divided into 11–21 lance-like segments. Garden valerian is known from all four counties in the NCWMA boundary and from a number of counties in southern Wisconsin. Descriptions of the preferred habitat indicate that it prefers disturbed areas, however, the plant has been observed in high quality natural areas where no sign of disturbance is present. The light seed of garden valerian is easily dispersed by wind which may explain why it has been found great distances from known populations. Due to the plant's ability to easily in the wind, and its relatively low abundance in the Lake Superior region, any populations of this plant should be controlled when found. Control methods that have proven effective for garden valerian include; pulling or mowing prior to flowering or using a foliar herbicide application of triclopyr or glyphosate.

**Common teasel** (*Dipsacus fullonum*) and **cut-leaf teasel** are aggressive perennials introduced to North America from Eurasia and North Africa. Teasels prefer sunny disturbed areas in wet or dry soil, and form large patches that choke out all other plants. The plants are 2–7 feet tall with lance-shaped leaves and a dense cylindrical flower that is purple or white and blooms in July–August. Cut-leaf teasel is more common in the upper Midwest, however common teasel is the only teasel found within the NCWMA boundary, with a documented occurrence in Bayfield County. At this time, very few sites of common teasel occur in the Lake Superior region. Control of this plant at this stage could prevent common teasel from taking over miles of road ditches and invading vulnerable natural areas nearby. Control methods that have been found to be effective are: cutting the root below the soil just prior to flowering, hand-pulling, and/or using an herbicide such as glyphosate, triclopyr, or clopyralid.

Thanks to Matt Bushman, Botanist, US Forest Service for this article.



Common teasel.  
Photo by  
Stephen Solheim.  
UW-Stevens Point  
Herbarium



Common teasel.  
Photo by  
Merel Black.  
UW-Stevens  
Point Herbarium