

RUSSIAN KNAPWEED



Introduction

Welcome to our "Weed of the Month" feature, designed to raise awareness about the impact of noxious invasive weeds on our environment. This month, we're focusing on Russian Knapweed (*Rhaponticum repens*), an aggressive plant species that poses a significant threat to native ecosystems and agricultural lands.

Russian Knapweed is listed as a B rated noxious weed. It currently exists in many parts of Sutter County and can be spotted along roadsides, empty fields, near canals, and on vacant lots.

Identification & Behavior

Russian Knapweed is an aggressive perennial forb that is native to Eurasia and has been expanding in California. Rosettes are gray-green and deeply pinnately lobed. The flowers are pink to lavender and the flower heads contain only tubular florets, the flower heads are smooth, globular, with whitish-edged bracts.

This noxious perennial can grow to be 3 ft tall. The stems are erect, branched, leafy, and mostly covered with gray hairs. The leaves alternate and are mostly oblong in shape. Russian Knapweed roots can grow several feet deep, branching frequently to form an extensive vertical and horizontal root system.

Impact

Russian Knapweed crowds out native species and is toxic to horses, but livestock usually avoid grazing it because of its bitter taste. It has been shown that the plant can take up zinc from deep in the soil profile and deposit it on the soil surface to create a toxic environment.

Russian Knapweed can rapidly colonize disturbed areas. Populations are often extremely long-lived due to extensive root systems. Once established, Russian Knapweed is extremely drought tolerant and favors dry sites with full sun. It is of particular concern in disturbed habitats, such as rangeland and agricultural lands.

Top left: Russian Knapweed in flower

Middle: Russian Knapweed rosette

Right: Russian Knapweed seed



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Control & Management

Mechanical control methods include hand pulling or digging, but these techniques do not control established plants because shoots quickly resprout from vast root reserves. Multiple mowing passes during a season can suppress the weed, but mowing alone will not eliminate the infestation.

Chemical control should be applied between postemergence, bud stage to senescence. Applying during the preemergence stage has also shown efficacy. Aromatic amino acid inhibitors and branched-chain amino acid inhibitors are also effective.

Prevention

Identification is key when it comes to preventing and controlling the spread of Russian Knapweed. Routinely inspect and maintain your property for any signs of this invader. Be vigilant for any signs of this weed in your area and report sightings to the Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office at (530) 822-7500.

By staying informed and taking proactive measures, we can work together to curb the spread of Russian Knapweed (*Rhaponticum repens*) and protect our native ecosystems. Join us next month for a new "Weed of the Month" feature, where we'll highlight another noxious invasive plant and share tips on how to address it.

Resources

For more information about Russian Knapweed, visit the UC Davis Weed Research & Information Center website at:

https://wric.ucdavis.edu/information/natural%20areas/wr_A/Acroptilon.pdf

For more weed newsletters or information about our other county programs, visit our website at:

<https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/agricultural-department>



Thank you for your dedication to preserving our environment and agricultural land!

-Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office

