

# Know Your Knapweeds

Knapweeds are aggressive, invasive weeds. They are listed as Prohibited Noxious weed under the *Alberta Weed Control Act*. Under this designation they must be eradicated when found in Alberta.

They are commonly found in pastures, cultivated fields, roadsides, railroads and disturbed sites. They increase costs to land stewards, consume soil nutrients, pose an increase in fire hazard and easily crowd out native vegetation. Knapweeds have little forage value, thus reducing grazing potential of pastures and rangeland, affecting both domestic livestock and wildlife.



To report sightings of any of these Knapweeds call the **Alberta Pest Surveillance System 310-2777 (APSS)**  
PLEASE REPORT EXACT LOCATION

## The best knapweed control is prevention.

Learn to identify your Knapweeds to keep an infestation from becoming established.

### Bighead Knapweed (present in Alberta)

*Centaurea macrocephala*



**HEIGHT:** 50-170 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Perennial with several un-branched stems

**LEAVES:** Light-green in color, leaf much longer (5-20 cm) than wide (2-10 cm), with widest point below middle, wavy/ toothed edges, hairy and pointed tips

**BRACT:** Thin & papery, with fringed edges

**FLOWER:** Yellow color and approx. 6 cm across

**FOUND:** Commonly grown as ornamental, but has potential as an invader if allowed to escape

### Diffuse Knapweed (present in Alberta)

*Centaurea diffusa*



**HEIGHT:** 20-80 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Annual or short lived perennial that is very branched

**LEAVES:** Slivery-green, lower leaves are very divided, upper leaves are narrow and elliptical

**BRACT:** Covered with "comb-like" spines

**FLOWER:** Usually white but can be rose or purple and approx. 1.5 cm across

**FOUND:** Disturbed sites in grasslands, woodlands and open coniferous forests

### Spotted Knapweed (present in Alberta)

*Centaurea stoebe ssp. micranthos*



**HEIGHT:** 30-150 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Biennial or short lived perennial, with many stems that branch

**LEAVES:** Medium-green with a silvery-gray cast; deeply lobed on young plants becoming elliptical with maturity

**BRACT:** Fringed tips dark & short

**FLOWER:** Purple, pink or sometimes white and approx. 4 cm across

**FOUND:** Roadsides, fields and open forests

### Black Knapweed

*Centaurea nigra*



**HEIGHT:** 30-150 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Perennial from woody root crown, with few stems and openly branched at middle

**LEAVES:** Green-gray, leaf much longer than wide, roughly hairy, leaf margins may be slightly lobed to continuous margins and will gradually become smaller towards flowers

**BRACT:** Covered with "comb-like", dark brown or black fringed margins up to 3x as long as the bract

**FLOWER:** Rose to lavender color and approx. 3 cm across

**FOUND:** Roadsides, fields, clearings and waste areas

### Meadow Knapweed

*Centaurea x moncktonii*



**HEIGHT:** 30-150 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Perennial that is openly branched near top

**LEAVES:** Deep-green, leaves are much longer than wide, hairy and stalkless. Basal leaves occasionally with wavy margins or lobed, taper at both ends, upper leaves are smaller and not lobed

**BRACT:** Fringes gold to dark brown, about the width of the bract and rounded at the tip

**FLOWER:** Rose to purple and approx. 2 cm across

**FOUND:** Roadsides, riverbanks, pastures, meadows, forest openings and waste areas

### Squarrose Knapweed

*Centaurea virgata ssp. squarrosa*



**HEIGHT:** 20-50 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Perennial with many stems that branch near top

**LEAVES:** Green and resin-gland-dotted. Lower leaves are deeply divided, upper leaves are smaller, with few lobes

**BRACT:** Spine at tip of bract strongly curved backward, longer than spines at side of bract

**FLOWER:** Rose, purple to pink and approx. 1 cm across, fruiting heads are dropped at maturity

**FOUND:** Rangelands, pastures, open forests and roadsides

### Brown Knapweed (present in Alberta)

*Centaurea jacea*



**HEIGHT:** 30-150 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Perennial that is openly branched near top

**LEAVES:** Green-gray, leaf much longer than wide, roughly hairy, leaf margins may be slightly lobed to continuous margins and will gradually become smaller towards flowers

**BRACT:** Tips are wider than base and the thin, papery margins have a dark brown centre

**FLOWER:** Rose to purple and approx. 3 cm across

**FOUND:** Roadsides, fields, clearings and waste areas

### Russian Knapweed (present in Alberta)

*Rhaponticum repens*



**HEIGHT:** 30-100 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Hardy, long lived perennial, branched stem with creeping roots

**LEAVES:** Slivery-green, hairy, lower leaves long and lobed, upper leaves smaller & toothed

**BRACT:** Pearly and papery, with no noticeable fringes or spines

**FLOWER:** Pink to purple and approx. 1 cm across

**FOUND:** Fields, roadsides, riverbanks, ditches, clear cuts and cultivated ground

### Tyrol Knapweed

*Centaurea nigrescens*



**HEIGHT:** 30-150 cm

**GROWTH HABIT:** Perennial that is openly branched near top

**LEAVES:** Basal oblong leaves are much longer than wide. Lobed leaves, terminal lobe much larger than other lobes, upper leaves are smaller, with few lobes

**BRACT:** Bract tipped with triangular fringe, which ends abruptly, not tapering down the side of long slender green base of the bract

**FLOWER COLOR:** Rose to purple and approx. 3 cm across

**FOUND:** Roadsides, fields and waste areas

PHOTO CREDITS: Bract images courtesy of Identification of Knapweeds and Starthistles in the Pacific Northwest by Cindy Talbott Roche, M.S., former Washington State University Cooperative Extension coordinator, and Ben F. Roche, Jr., Ph.D., WSU Cooperative Extension range management specialist, deceased. | Bighead Knapweed - Nicole Kimmel, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development, Richard Old, XID Services, Inc., Bugwood.org | Diffuse Knapweed - Nicole Kimmel, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development | Spotted Knapweed - Michael Shagard, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org, Norman E. Rees, USDA Agricultural Research Service - Retired, Bugwood.org | Black Knapweed - Cindy Roche, Bugwood.org | Meadow Knapweed - Cindy Roche, Bugwood.org, Steve Dewey, Utah State University, Bugwood.org | Brown Knapweed - Cindy Roche, Bugwood.org | Russian Knapweed - Steve Dewey, Utah State University, Bugwood.org, Norman E. Rees, USDA Agricultural Research Service - Retired, Bugwood.org | Tyrol Knapweed - Joseph M. DiTomaso, University of California - Davis, Bugwood.org



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Government of Alberta

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