

Canada Thistle

Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is a tall (two- four feet) perennial herbaceous plant. Leaves are large with sharp, spiny edges. Flowers (below) are bright or deep purple, bristly clusters and bloom continuously through the summer. Mature flower heads produce thousands of small, feathery seeds and are easily dispersed by wind.



Photo: Paul Drobot

How did it get here?

This plant is native to Eurasia and North Africa. In the 1600s it was introduced in the United States, most likely by accident, in a seed or crop mixture. Canada thistle easily establishes itself in disturbed areas with exposed soil. These areas include old building sites, gravel pits, and roadsides. Beaver ponds are also excellent breeding grounds for this species.



Shown at left is a young thistle rosette. This is the first sign of a thistle invasion.

Photo: Christopher Noll

***Help stop the spread - report this plant!**

Bull Thistle

Bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) is a tall (three- six feet) biennial herbaceous plant. Large, alternate leaves have sharp spines at the tip. The tall, thick stems are also sharp and covered in prickles. Round, robust flower heads (left) are pinkish purple and bloom mid- late summer. Mature seed heads produce thousands of small, feathery seeds and are easily dispersed by wind.



Photo: Steve C. Garske

How did it get here?

This plant is native to Eurasia. In the 1800s it was introduced in the United States colonial areas, most likely by accident, in a seed or crop mixture. Bull thistle easily establishes itself in disturbed areas with exposed soil. These areas include old building sites, gravel pits, and roadsides. Beaver ponds are also excellent habitat for this species. Unlike Canada thistle, which tends to grow in dense clumps, bull thistles grow as solitary plants.



Bull Thistle Plant, NPS Photo

***Help stop the spread - report this plant!**

What is Voyageurs National Park doing to remove alien invaders?

Park staff are working hard to remove exotic plants from Voyageurs National Park. You may see park staff conducting one of these methods, depending on the type of plant:

- * **Mechanical:** mowing, cutting, or using any type of equipment to remove a plant from an area.
- * **Chemical:** applying an herbicide or chemical to kill a certain plant and prevent it from flowering and producing more seeds.
- * **Biological:** using insects or other living things to feed on the exotic plant.

How you can help...

- * Become familiar with exotic plants and inform a park naturalist if you find any growing in Voyageurs National Park.
- * Clean off any seeds from your shoes and clothing after a hike to prevent spreading plants to other areas.
- * Only hike, drive, or camp in permitted areas to prevent spreading exotic plants from place to place.

We appreciate your help in preventing the spread of alien invaders to keep your park natural and beautiful.

Voyageurs National Park

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Voyageurs National Park

Alien Plant Invaders



Field of Reed Canary Grass, NPS Photo

Did you know Voyageurs National Park has been invaded by alien plants? The park is home to a diverse group of plants and animals. Unfortunately, not all are found here naturally. Alien, or exotic, species are any plants or animals brought here from another part of the world. These species are not found naturally in the park, but are now calling it their home.

Many exotics can cause problems to native plants and animals and must be removed to protect our natural landscape.

Read on to learn which alien species are invading Voyageurs National Park.

What's the problem with having alien species in Voyageurs National Park?

Many visitors come to Voyageurs National Park for the beautiful scenery and natural landscape. As more exotic species move into the area, they compete with native, or natural, plants for sunlight, water, soil and space – everything a plant needs to survive!

However, plants are not the only ones affected by exotics. Wildlife rely on native plants for food and shelter and they may not adapt to feeding on exotic plants. This could force wildlife to leave the area in search of a better home, reducing your chance of spotting wildlife in the park.



NPS Photo

How do exotic species become invasive?

Not all alien species are harmful to our natural landscape. However, exotics are difficult to control if they become *invasive*. The term *invasive* refers to plants that spread quickly through an area and take over the native species living there. Exotics are successful in invading new places...

- If they lack natural predators
- If they produce large numbers of seeds each year
- If they disperse seeds very well
- If they produce toxins, spines, or prickles

Wild Parsnip

Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) is a tall (six inches – four feet) perennial herbaceous plant. It spends the first year as a small rosette (six inches tall) and can grow up to four feet in its flowering stage. Wild parsnip has broad, flat-topped yellow flowers (below) which bloom throughout the summer months.



Photo: Christopher Noll

How did it get here?

This plant is native to Europe and Asia. Because the roots are edible, it was brought to the United States and planted as a food source. It escaped farm fields and is now a widespread invasive plant across the United States.

Warning: Visitors should be aware of wild parsnip and how to identify the plant. This plant, when cut or disturbed, produces a toxic juice. If the juice contacts the skin and reacts with sunlight, it can cause severe rashes and burns. This condition is known as phytophotodermatitis.

Help stop the spread - report this plant!

Reed Canary Grass



Photo: Stephen L. Solheim

Reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) is a tall (up to six feet), cool season grass. It has wide leaves (up to 1/3") which can grow to 10" long. Flowers are greenish purple and bloom in spring through early summer. Seed heads are light brown and mature in mid- late July.

How did it get here?

This plant has a similar species native to North America. However, it has been crossed with a European strain to create a highly invasive plant. This "hybrid" has been planted as "marsh hay" in wet areas to provide food for livestock. Because of its invasive nature, reed canary grass is often planted along roadsides and at construction sites to prevent erosion.



*Help stop the spread - report this plant!

Birdsfoot Trefoil

Birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) is a low-lying perennial herbaceous plant. Individual plants spread horizontally, forming large, dense mats across the ground. Yellow flowers form in groups of 3- 12 and bloom continuously through most of the summer. Mature seed pods are one inch long; clusters of pods together remind people of a "bird's foot".



Photo: Merel R. Black

How did it get here?

This plant is native to Eurasia and North Africa and was introduced to the United States for its benefits. Farmers found birdsfoot trefoil to be an excellent forage for cattle because it produces large amounts per acre.

In Voyageurs National Park, it was used for erosion prevention along roadsides and at construction sites. Now, because of its ability to spread quickly, birdsfoot trefoil is being removed and replaced by native plants.

Help stop the spread - report this plant!