

thistle

Cirsium spp.

FEATURES

Several species of thistles grow in Illinois. These biennial plants have simple, jagged-toothed, lance-shaped leaves. Leaves are arranged alternately along the stem. The hairy stem is upright and branched. Many flowers are crowded together into heads at the stem tips. Flower color ranges from violet to pink to yellow to white, depending on the species. The fruit is an achene (hard, dry, one-seeded fruit). Thistles may attain a height of three to nine feet.

BEHAVIORS

Thistles may be found throughout Illinois. They grow in roadsides, fields, prairies and open woods. Flowers are produced from June through October. Birds, particularly American goldfinches, eat the fruits.

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Plantae
Division: Magnoliophyta
Class: Magnoliopsida
Order: Asterales
Family: Asteraceae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native, nonnative
Two species of thistle that grow in Illinois are naturalized from Europe and one is naturalized from the western United States.

ILLINOIS RANGE





flowers





leaves

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

coniferous forests; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; edge