Garfield County

Weed Wise

Russian Knapweed

Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) is a deep-rooted perennial that was introduced from Europe. It grows from 18 to 36 inches tall. The flowers are vase-shaped with pink or purple petals that turn straw-colored when the plant matures. Stems and sometimes leaves are covered with fine white hair that gives them a bluish color. It has an extensive underground root. A single plant can produce upwards of 1,200 seeds every year and they can remain viable for up to 8 years. Russian knapweed appeared in Garfield County about 50 years ago and is found extensively in the Dry Hollow, Silt Mesa and Missouri Heights areas.

Russian knapweed can be very toxic to horses when it is consumed over time. Once poisoning occurs, horses are unable to chew and swallowing and drinking are severely impaired. Poisoning is irreversible and death by starvation will occur.

Russian knapweed plants (above) and flower (below).

Management

Mowing Russian knapweed before the plants set their seed will minimize the number of seeds it produces, but it will not kill the plant. Cutting or pulling the plant several times before it flowers will stress the knapweed and force it to use its reserves stored in the root system. This will produce a weaker plant that is susceptible to herbicide, which is the recommended form of control. Contact the Garfield County Vegetation Management Department for recommendations on appropriate handling of herbicides and which herbicide to use.

The most effective time to treat Russian knapweed is in the spring when the plant is in the rosette stage or dormant plants in the fall after the first freeze. Garfield County, in cooperation with the local Conservation Districts, offer cost-share programs that provide financial assistance to private landowners for the management of noxious weeds, including Russian knapweed.

For more information about Russian knapweed or the cost-share program, contact Garfield County Vegetation Management at 970-945-1377, ext. 4305 or santhony@garfield-county.com.