



Photo by Jennifer Ackerfield

Find Native Thistles

Native thistles (*Cirsium* sp.) are important components of our landscape. Unfortunately, they are often mistaken for invasive, weedy plants. Our native thistles can be distinguished from the only two invasive thistles in the Denver metro area by occurring individually (versus occurring rhizomatous as in Canada thistle, *Cirsium arvense*) and by lacking rigid hairs on the upper leaf surface (as in bull thistle, *Cirsium vulgare*). All thistles are easily recognized by their large, prickly stature and flowers arranged in heads.

The new head curator of natural history collections at Denver Botanic Gardens, Jennifer Ackerfield, is passionate about thistles. Her research has even identified at least two new species of native thistles “hidden” in plain sight in Colorado. Help the Gardens document the abundance and distribution of all native thistles by photographing as many plants as possible in the month of July. Post your findings to iNaturalist so they will be automatically added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is okay if they are weeds! Avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive plants or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the “geoprivacy” of the observation to “obscured.”
4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.
6. Sign up to be a member of the Denver EcoFlora Project on iNaturalist to receive updates and additional information.

How Do I Participate Given COVID-19?

As a participant, it is up to you how much or how little you take part. Please stay close to home and maintain a social distance of 6 feet from others. Wear a cloth mask in public areas. Respect closures and avoid places of high use. Do only what feels safe for you and your family and is in accordance with your local regulations.

What is the Goal?

The Denver EcoFlora Project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area’s flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests are part of the Denver EcoFlora Project. These monthly quests challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the Denver – Boulder metro area via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.