

TRACY'S THISTLE

Some residents have been killing Tracy's Thistle along neighborhood roads, in the mistaken belief that all thistles are noxious weeds. Tracy's Thistle (*Cirsium tracyi*) is a native wildflower and valuable wildlife plant. The flowers are used by hummingbirds, butterflies, and bumblebees and the seed heads are a major food source for goldfinches.

Tracy's Thistle is easily distinguished from the three noxious weed thistles found in Greater Loghill Village (Canada, musk and bull thistle). It has wavy gray-green leaves with spiny edges and is a biennial, that is, it forms a rosette of leaves the first year and puts up a flower stalk the second year, before dying. It spreads solely by seeds, not underground roots as does the weed Canada thistle. When flowering, the plants range from about one foot to three feet in height, depending on growing conditions.

Like the alien weed thistles, Tracy's Thistle prefers to grow in disturbed areas, which is why it is often seen along roads, especially where the natural gas lines were buried. The flower heads are light pink and about one to two inches across, which is quite a bit larger than the flowers of Canada thistle. The flower cup has bracts (spine-tipped "shingles") that each have a distinctive white line on them. Tracy's thistle flowers several weeks earlier than any of the weed thistles; it is the first thistle to be seen flowering in the late Spring.

Pictures of Tracy's Thistle can be seen in an internet photo album here:

<http://www.photoworks.com/slideshow/album/A9D9BB218EAD?source=pw980>

Pictures of six noxious weeds found in our neighborhood, including the three weed thistles, can be seen here:

<http://www.photoworks.com/slideshow/album/ABC46331FF0B?source=pw980>

Pictures of many of our native wildflowers can be viewed here:

<http://www.photoworks.com/slideshow/album/AEC13631FF08?source=pw980>