

Russian Thistle

(*Salsola kali*)

There are seven species of Russian Thistle found throughout 46 of the lower 48 US states. These different species often hybridize, so taken as a whole the Russian Thistles have a widespread occurrence. They are seen as a noxious weed in many settings because of its ability to obstruct roadways and stream channels, bury fence lines and present a fire hazard. Russian Thistle typically grows upright, 1 – 3 feet tall and 1 – 5 feet in width.

Like the weed Kochia, Russian Thistle is a highly effective reproducer. In late fall when the seeds are mature, the main stem breaks off from the root structure and the plant body “tumbles” along, carried by the wind, and disperses its seeds as it rolls. The classic Tumbleweed - one plant can produce 250,000 seeds!

Russian Thistle has inconspicuous flowers that bloom in the summer and fall, from June to as late as October in more southern geographies. The plant lives until the first frost. The pollen produced by Russian Thistle is considered to be a severe allergen. It is capable of causing allergic rhinitis, asthma and allergic conjunctivitis (allergy symptoms/inflammation in the eyes). Several allergenic proteins have been isolated from Russian Thistle pollen, and there is some cross-reactivity with other genera (*Chenopodium* such as Lambsquarters, and *Amaranthus* such as Pigweed). However the major allergen in Russian Thistle is not found in any other genus, and thus Russian Thistle should be tested for as a unique allergenic plant.

