



Perennial Sow Thistle

Sonchus arvensis



Photo: Wikipedia



Photo: Wikipedia

Photos: MSU College

What's the problem

Typically considered a weed, this plant easily establishes and takes over disturbed areas like agricultural field edges, outcompeting native species and forming monocultures that provide little benefit to the environment.

CHARACTERISTICS

Life cycle	Persists annually, begins producing new leaf growth in spring, producing multiple small yellow flowers per plant.
Height	60–150 cm (1–4 ft) throughout growing season.
Leaves	Leaves are alternate, and vary from the lower leaves (lobed and irregularly toothed) to the middle/upper leaves (small, no lobes/teeth).
Flowers	Flower is bright yellow with many small rays, appears similar to a common dandelion, but with multiple flowers per stem.
Stem	Long, slender stem that is smooth towards the leaves and appears hairy near the flowerheads.
Bloom Time	Flowers appear from June to late autumn.
Commonly Found	Disturbed areas such as roadsides, agricultural fields, and open pastures.

Key ID Features

- Stems are long with leaves growing along the entire length, and generates a milky white sap when broken.
- Multiple flowers on each plant branching from the main stem, bases of flower clasp in before flower blooms (see picture)

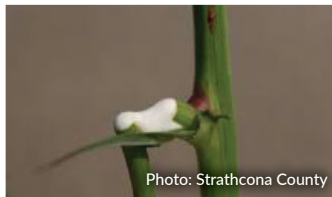


Photo: Strathcona County

Stem produces a white milky substance when broken



Photo: David Nicholls

Flower bases "clasp" in around the flower before blooming

Common Look-a-Likes



Photo: Arthur Haine

Common Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinal*):

- Only one flower per stem, flowers emerge earlier in the year (May–June)
- Leaves only grow at the base of the plant, not along the entire stem



Photo: Glen Mittelhauser

Yellow Hawkweed (*PHieracium caespitosum*):

- Stems are also long, but have no leaves along the stem
- Flowers are clustered tightly together at the top of the main stem



Photo: Glen Mittelhauser

Common/Annual sow thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*):

- Multiple flowers clustered at the top of the main stem vs branched, more aggressive thistle-like spikes
- Leaves are more deeply lobed and have little to no teeth along the edges.