KING COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL PROGRAM WEED ALERT

Gorse

Ulex europaeus — Pea Family

Class B Noxious Weed: Control Required

Identification Tips

- Dense, spiny evergreen shrub
- Grows up to 15 feet tall and 30 feet wide
- Showy, fragrant yellow pea-shaped flowers form in clusters at the ends of branches
- Branches are covered with spinelike leaves, 1/2 to 2 inches long

Biology

- Flowers primarily from late February through April, but may have flowers throughout the year
- Reproduces primarily by seed; when mature, the seedpods split and eject seeds several feet away
- One mature plant can produce up to 18,000 seeds
- Seeds can remain viable in the soil for 25 to 40 years
- Plants grow outward, forming a central area of dry, dead vegetation

Impacts

- Displaces native and beneficial plants
- Increases the cost of forestry practices
- Renders rangeland and grasslands worthless
- Dense stands impede the movement of wildlife
- Creates a serious fire hazard during dry seasons due to high concentrations of volatile oils in its branches
- Increases erosion on steep slopes

Distribution

- Scattered throughout King County including in pastures, vacant lands, harvested timberlands and along rivers
- Likes sandy or gravelly soils with abundant moisture
- Thrives in full sun, but will also establish in shady areas
- Often becomes established on non-tillable land and inaccessible places like fence rows and river banks

Gorse plants have showy, pea-shaped yellow flowers (above) and sharp, spinelike leaves 1/2 to 2 inches long (right).

Once established, gorse forms dense thickets that crowds out other vegetation and renders land nearly worthless.

King County
Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Water and Land Resources Division
Noxious Weed Control Program
206-296-0290 TTY Relay: 711

What You Can Do

The King County Noxious Weed Control Program is actively trying to control the spread of gorse. Do your part by removing this weed from your property and washing vehicles, boots and animals that may have been in infested areas. If you find it growing on public lands, please report the location to our 24-hour program information line at 206-296-0290.

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons. Follow-up treatments will be necessary to control seedlings.

Weed wrenches work well on mature gorse stands.

Manual: For small sites with few plants, dig up plants taking care to remove all the roots so the plants will not re-sprout. This method can be highly labor-intensive and to be fully effective, all mature plants need to be removed so no new seeds are produced. Seedlings should be pulled by hand as cutting with a mower will promote growth. Removing medium to large plants is much easier with specially designed steel weed wrenches. Several wrenches are available to borrow from the King County Noxious Weed Control Program (call for more info).

Mechanical: Just cutting the top growth does not kill gorse. In fact, prolific resprouting will result if the stem is cut anywhere above the root. To be effective, cutting should only be used if combined with an herbicide application to the stumps immediately after cutting. Cut plant material should be disposed of by chipping or removed from the site to avoid creating a fire hazard.

Chemical: Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. Herbicides should only be applied at the rates specified on the label. Foliar herbicide application is most effective after full leaf development and after blooms start to drop. Basal or cut stump treatment methods are also effective. With mature plants, cut them back first and then spray tender, new shoots. On older stems, a surfactant may be necessary. Products containing glyphosate are most effective if applied to actively growing plants. Glyphosate is absorbed by the growing leaves (not woody stems). However, glyphosate is "non-selective" and will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with, so make sure not to drip on desirable plants. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredient of triclopyr, 2,4-D and metsulfuron work well for lawn or pasture areas as they won't harm grasses. When using this type of herbicide or one with glyphosate, do not cut down the treated plants until they have died completely. This can take two weeks or more. Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. For more on herbicide use, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.

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Scotch broom

Scotch Broom vs. Gorse: These two weeds look very similar and grow in the same habitat so it it easy to confuse them. Both are evergreen shrubs with small yellow flowers. However, gorse plants have sharp spinelike leaves; brooms have small, simple leaves. Another important difference: Control of Scotch broom is only required on I-90, between mile marker 34 and the King/Kittitas county line; control of Scotch broom is not required for the remainder of the county, but it is recommended wherever feasible. Gorse is required for control thoughout King County, not just in specific areas. For more information on controlling Scotch broom, please contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.

Information Program Line: 206-296-0290
Website: http://dnr.metrokc.gov/weeds

King County