

Gorse

Invasive Species Alert Sheet

Regional Invasive Species Program

The spread of non-native invasive plants has serious ecological, economic and health impacts.

Local governments and partners are asking for help from all residents to address **gorse** (*Ulex europaeus*) outbreaks on private property and public lands. Homeowners can manage this plant themselves, or reach out to professionals for support.

This spiny, evergreen shrub is native to the Mediterranean region. Outbreaks in the capital region are in various locations, including on some Gulf Islands. Originally planted as a natural fence due to its height and density, gorse now displaces native vegetation and increases the risk of wildfire.



Why is gorse a problem?

- **A fire hazard**, gorse contains volatile oils and produces a large amount of flammable litter. This hazard is increasing as climate change causes altered wildfire regimes
- **Displaces native vegetation** through aggressive spread, decreasing foraging capability for wildlife and decreasing local plant biodiversity, also increases erosion
- **Decreases recreational opportunities** due to its spiny nature
- **Classified as a noxious weed** in the province of British Columbia



Gorse has yellow flowers and is very spiny. The seeds are black and hairy.

What does it look like?

- **Flowers:** bright yellow and pea flower-like, 1.5-2 cm long, found as single flowers on hairy stalks, fragrant
- **Stems:** 5 angled, dense, spiny, single upright stems, 1-3 m tall, heavily branched with sparse hairs
- **Leaves:** leaflets in 3s in young plants, scales or spines on mature plants. Spines are branched and grooved, and reach 1.5-2.5 cm in length

- **Seeds:** black and hairy seedpods 1.5-2 cm long
- **Roots:** strong taproot that extends deep into the ground
- **Could be confused with:** invasive Scotch broom, in the same family as gorse, also has yellow pea-like flowers, but broom is not spiny

Habitat and biology

- Prefers open clearings with direct sunlight such as sandy or rocky areas, roadsides and ditches, fields and pastures, bluffs, cutblocks and cutbanks. Adapted to low soil fertility and full sun exposure
- A perennial evergreen shrub in the pea (Fabaceae) family
- Each shrub can live up to 45 years
- Reproduces by seed – up to 18,000 seeds are produced per mature plant throughout its lifetime. The seeds mature in pods and can remain viable for up to 40 years
- Seeds are released by the splitting pods, and dispersed by wind, water, animals and machinery

Prevention

- **Do not buy, grow or trade this plant.** Clean off shoes, pets, equipment, and vehicles when leaving areas where this species is present
- **Use clean soil,** gravel, sand, hay/straw that are free of seeds – buy local!

What to do if you spot a gorse plant:

- **Caution:** plants have sharp spines that can pierce clothing and skin
- **Inform:** please report outbreaks to the contacts listed below for support and monitoring
- **Remove:** roots and seedlings must be fully removed to prevent re-sprouting. Cutting plants is not effective to removing an infestation.



- **Prevent spread:** wash all clothing, equipment and pets that have been in infested areas to prevent the spread of seeds
- **Monitor:** monitor your property for growths and outbreaks. Follow-up treatments to remove seedlings growing from root portions or from the seed bank will be needed
- **Replant:** after effectively eliminating this species, replant with appropriate native species
- **Do not disturb** infested areas until you are planning to remove plants, see below, as this can cause seed germination

For small infestations (<20 plants):

- **Manually remove:** by cutting and then digging up the entire root
- **Monitor:** for several years as seedbank can survive and persist for many years
- **Replant:** replant non-invasive or native species

Large infestations (>20 plants):

- Larger equipment may be required to dig up the roots of larger plants.
- Herbicides may be a helpful, based on local and provincial regulations

Proper disposal:

- **Do not compost!** Flowers can still form viable seeds after removal, and root fragments persist.
- Put all plant material in garbage bags or a covered load and dispose. The best option is to take the bags or load labelled “invasive species” to the Hartland Landfill.
- Controlled burning may be appropriate for disposal depending on local regulations

CONTACT INFORMATION

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