Gorse

Ulex species

What does it look like?

Gorse is a deep-rooted, woody perennial shrub that can grow to 4m tall. It has densely spined branches and is woody when mature. Gorse has bright yellow flowers from May to November, and black seed pods in summer. Gorse seed reserves in the soil are long-lasting and abundant under and near established infestations.

Why is it a problem?

Gorse is a very invasive plant that has established on thousands of hectares of hill and less intensively farmed country, and can form vast areas where it is the dominant species. In dry hot summer weather, a gorse fire burns really hot and is a significant risk.

Gorse has the ability to occupy a wide range of soil types including light sands, heavy clays and disturbed soils, and recovers easily after burning. It is quick to colonise new areas, forming dense thickets. Habitat includes river-beds, pasture, scrubland, road sides and waste land as well as low growing or regenerating native vegetation and forest margins.

An established hedge can produce up to 6 million seeds per hectare per year. Flowering begins when the plant is around 18 months old, with flowering usually occurring in spring and autumn. In cold climates flowering may only occur once a year, but flowers can remain year-round when conditions are favourable. Bushes can live for up to 30 years.

As a member of the nitrogen-fixing family, gorse can promote healthy soil nutrient levels: depending on the native species growing, this may or may not be an advantage. Gorse is also referred to as a 'nursery plant' as it shelters young plants and then slowly dies off due to its shade intolerance, as native species begin to create a canopy cover. This process can take decades.

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Control Methods

Physical control

Sites with appropriate native tall forest species present can usually be left to be overtopped. Exclusion of grazing stock is essential. This can also be sped-up by selective slashing, stump swabbing or planting.

Herbicide control

Stump swab: 250ml glyphosate (360g/l) per 750ml water or 2g metsulfuron-methyl (600g/kg) per 1L water or 250ml triclopyr (600 EC) per 750ml water or 100ml Tordon Brushkiller per 1L water or Vigilant gel. Or,

Spray (spring-summer): 60 ml triclopyr (600 EC) per 10L water.

Spray (autumn-winter): 5g metsulfuron-methyl (600g/kg) + penetrant per 10L - knapsack or (35g/100L + penetrant - spraygun) or Tordon Brushkiller (250ml/100L spraygun). Or,

Frilling: With a sharp chisel or axe, make a deep cut into the sapwood at regular intervals around the base of the tree, taking care not to ring-bark the plant. Immediately saturate each cut with undiluted Tordon Brushkiller. Or,

Drill and fill. Drill 10-12mm holes around trunk at 200mm spacing and fill with undiluted Tordon Brushkiller using a sheep drench pack with a spraygun.

CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

Biological control

Between 1989 and 2007, populations of gorse spider mite, gorse thrips, gorse pod moth, gorse colonial hard shoot moth, and gorse soft shot moth have been released in the Wellington region. The pod moth, spider mite and thrips are all now widespread in the region. Contact GW for more information.

Related Links

New Zealand Plant Conservation Network https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ulex-europaeus/
Biocontrol https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/discover-our-research/biosecurity/weed-management/using-biocontrol/
Weedbusters https://www.weedbusters.org.nz/what-are-weeds/weed-list/gorse/