



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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GORSE

Ulex europaeus

THREAT: Gorse, introduced from Europe as an ornamental, is a dense evergreen shrub. A member of the pea family, it is similar to Scotch broom but covered with sharp spinelike leaves. Gorse can form dense stands, crowding out other vegetation and completely dominating the site. Due to its spiny, dense nature, it can make land practically worthless for other uses. Gorse produces large numbers of seeds, which are flung several feet from the parent plant, by the bursting pods. The seeds are resistant to fire and remain viable in the soil for many years. They can be spread by human activities, animals and water. Older gorse plants have a large amount of dead material and this, combined with the oil in the plant, can create a serious fire hazard.

DESCRIPTION: Gorse is a shrub that can grow up to 10 feet tall. It has erect, angular stems, with stiff spinelike leaves, ½ to 2 inches long. The plants stay green year round, although each plant grows outward, leaving a central area of dry, dead vegetation. Gorse flowers primarily in the early spring, but can continue flowering throughout the year, depending on its location. The flowers are yellow-orange in color and are borne in clusters near the ends of the branches. Seeds develop in pods, which burst open when ripe, flinging the seeds away from the parent plant. Gorse grows best in areas with mild winters and prefers sandy or coarse gravelly soils. It is often found on sand dunes, gravel bars, fencerows, riverbanks and logged or burnt forest lands.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Gorse is very difficult to eradicate once it has become established. For this reason, it is very important to control plants as early as possible. Small, isolated plants can be controlled by herbicides or by hand digging. For larger, established infestations, the use of herbicides can be cost prohibitive, as it takes multiple applications to kill the plants and the size of the shrubs require a lot of herbicide to fully cover the plants. Burning and cutting can remove the top growth, allowing the regrowth to be treated with herbicides. Plants can also be bulldozed and burnt but any roots left in the ground can result in regrowth. Care must be taken when burning gorse to prevent the fire from escaping. Cultivation, where practical, is one of the best ways of controlling gorse, however, it must be repeated for at least 2-3 years. As gorse produces a lot of seeds that can remain viable for a long time, any method of control must include yearly follow-up to find new seedlings. Contact the weed board for site-specific chemical recommendations.



