

SCOTCH BROOM: Options for control

Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), a member of the Fabaceae family, is a **class-B** noxious weed in Lincoln County, Washington. This well-known “west side” plant is also known as Scot's Broom, an invasive flowering shrub. Originally introduced from Europe as an ornamental and for erosion control, it is highly aggressive and forms dense, monotypic stands, which reduce wildlife habitat and hinders re-vegetation.

Scotch broom is an upright evergreen shrub in the Legume family, that has a taproot and an ability to fix nitrogen in the soil. It is loosely branched with green, slender ribbed branches and small, simple leaves up to half an inch long. It grows from 3 to 10 feet in height. The bright yellow flowers are pea-like, about three-quarters of an inch long. Its seed is born in dark brown to black hairy, flattened pea-like pods,

which when ripe, burst and scatter seeds for yards. Over 10,000 seeds per plant can be produced, lasting 60 to 80 years in the soil. Broom's deep roots, its ability to re-sprout from stumps, and its seeds long life span, makes this plant a highly invasive force to reckon with.



Scotch broom grows primarily in open, dry meadows and along roadsides. It thrives in full sun and prefers sandy, well-drained soil conditions, but can tolerate moist soil conditions and partial shade.

This flexibility combined with the production of many seeds and its ability to grow most of the year, facilitate the easy spread of this plant.

It is often confused with Spanish broom, which looks similar but is easily distinguished by its rounded, bright green stems, fragrant blossoms, and later flowering time.



Lower leaves composed of 3 leaflets dark green above, paler and fuzzy below.



A young Scotch broom plant.



Close-up of the golden-yellow flower and pod. Note the fine hairs on the fresh seed pods.

Key identifying traits

- **Woody shrub**, growing up to 10 ft. tall.
- **Flowers** are showy, yellow and abundant.
- **Leaves** composed of 3 leaflets dark green above, paler and **fuzzy below**.
- Flat **Pods** 1 to 1 1/2 inches long, fuzzy edges, brownish-black when ripe.
- Erect **branches** are slender, **grooved**, angled and dark green.
- **Winter stems** are bare of leaves, but usually remain bright green.



Sometimes the all yellow flower will be mixed with a little bit of red.



A close-up of a mature pod after releasing seeds. Also note the grooved stems.

Biology and ecology

- Aggressive, **deciduous**, perennial shrub.
- Often started as an ornamental.
- Dry **mature pods** are often heard “**popping**” as they split and eject seeds several feet.
- **Flowers** from April to June.
- Common pest in western Washington, **limited** infestations **east of the Cascades**.
- **Seeds remain viable** in the soil for many **decades**.
- Produces **large amounts of pollen** and is a real problem for allergy sufferers.



A hillside infested with Scotch broom.

CONTROL MEASURES:

For this and other publications, see our website at: www.co.lincoln.wa.us/weedboard

Prevention:

- Minimizing soil disturbances.
- Beware of contaminated gravel and logging equipment, especially from west of the Cascades.
- **Early detection** is vital to prevent invasion.

Biological:

- Seed weevil *Apion fuscirostre*, consumes the seeds and may assist in slowing the spread of the plant, but will not reduce an existing stand.

Cultural:

- Maintain a good competitive vegetative stand to help prevent infestation.

Mechanical:

- Plants can be controlled by grubbing out the root crowns. Diligent follow-up is needed to pull or dig new seedlings.
- Periodic mowing will reduce seed production, but it tends to encourage branching until a meadow of scotch broom plants is produced.

Chemical:

- Applications of Garlon 4 (triclopyr ester), Garlon 3A (triclopyr amine) or Crossbow (triclopyr + 2,4-D) have shown good results.
- For best results, use a surfactant.
- **Read the label** instructions before applying.



***Apion fuscirostre*:** A seed eating weevil, introduced in 1983, has established at many sites in western Washington and Oregon. Larvae consume the seeds and may assist in slowing the spread of the plant but will not reduce an existing stand. *Apion* prefers meadows and hillsides with southern exposures, while cold, damp, and heavily shaded areas, north-facing hillsides are undesirable. The insect reduces seed production and thus, decreases rate of spread. Extensive feeding by adults on small twigs has caused terminal die-back. Adults over winter in the duff near the host plant.



Above, a Scotch broom plant pre-bloom, and below, a hillside infested with the plant in full bloom.



Scotch broom



A good example of a young Scotch broom plant.



Photos and references courtesy of: King County Noxious Weed Board; Oregon State University Extension; Stevens County Noxious Weed Board, Invasive Plant Profile, Evergreen; University of California, Berkeley, photos, Carl Farmer; Steve Dewey; illustration from Koehler's Medicinal plants.

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