

Gorse

Ulex europaeus

Boundary Control Plant under the West Coast Regional Pest Plant Management Strategy



Where has it come from?

Gorse is a native of Western Europe which was originally introduced into New Zealand as a hedge plant. However the New Zealand climate proved ideal for its' growth and gorse is now recognised as a major pest plant. Gorse is well established over large tracts of West Coast land where there has been land disturbance.

What does Gorse look like?

Gorse is a deeply rooted woody perennial which grows up to 4 metres in height. It can form dense, impenetrable and very prickly thickets. The medium green leaves found on new growth rapidly change to spines as the plant matures and on older plants the inner growth becomes brown and dry. Branches on older plants can grow to up to 10cm in diameter.

Gorse develops prolific deep yellow flowers, attractive to honey bees, between May and November. Flowering is followed by development of 25mm long black seed pods with soft grey hairs. Under full sun the ripe pods split explosively to disperse the seeds up to 10m away. Gorse seeds can lie dormant in the ground for at least 30 years.

Why is Gorse a Pest Plant?

Gorse thrives in the ideal growing conditions found in New Zealand and the plant has spread throughout the whole country.

As the seed is highly viable, even after being in the ground for many years, gorse is difficult to eradicate, especially on pasture land and in river beds.

Whilst gorse is recognised as soil conditioner because its roots can fix nitrogen, and that large patches are ideal as nursery areas for native re-vegetation, this is of little help to farmers trying to maximise productivity of their land. Many West Coast farmers have significant expense in carrying out annual gorse controls.

What is the Boundary Control Rule for Gorse?

On the West Coast region, a boundary control rule only applies for gorse as the plant is too widespread for total control (eradication). The rule states that:

"Land occupiers must destroy any Gorse plants within 10m of the boundary when the adjoining land is clear of Gorse in excess of 50m of that boundary, or is effectively clear of Gorse."



*Top right: Gorse thicket
Above: Gorse flower detail*

What are the best methods of control?

To get value for money from all methods of gorse control, good planning and a combination of methods is usually necessary. Follow-up work will be essential.

Manual Methods

Handpulling of minor outbreaks of new plants is very effective but less labour intensive methods such as digging, slashing, cutting, burning and/or removal by machinery are necessary for large tracts of gorse. Regrowth stimulated by burning can be grazed and/or sprayed with herbicide to maintain control.

If these areas are to be utilised as pasture land a good sward must be maintained to counter gorse regrowth. Overgrazing, soil-pugging, poor drainage and poor soil fertility should be minimised. Lime can be applied to keep soil pH at 5.5 – 6.0.

Herbicide Methods

Spraying of large tracts of gorse should be carried out after spring flowering when there is maximum soft growth. Any commercial herbicide containing the active ingredients Glyphosate, Metsulfuron-methyl, Picloram or Triclopyr can be used, e.g. Roundup, Tordon Brushkiller. Better results will be obtained if a wetting agent or penetrant is also used. This use ensures the active ingredient is applied more evenly to the inner, woodier growth of large gorse plants.

For single plants within pasture land, stump treatment is a good option. Cut down plants to leave a short stump then apply a herbicide gel (same active ingredients as above) to the freshly cut stump. While this is more labour intensive than spraying it does not kill surrounding grass.

For personal safety please use all herbicides as per manufacturer's labelling

Biocontrols

A May 2006 NZ Landcare Research report to the West Coast Regional Council states that none of the Gorse Biocontrols released widely throughout New Zealand have been found to thrive on the West Coast. This is probably to the wetter climate. For more information refer to the article "Our Gaggles of Gorse Agents" in Issue 36, 'What's New in the Biocontrol of Weeds' at www.landcareresearch.co.nz or contact the WCRC Weedbusters Co-ordinator.

Where can I get more help?

For further information call either of the Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinators. They are:

Mary Traves: Environmental Information Officer, West Coast Regional Council (768 0466 or 0508 800 118)

Tom Belton: Technical Support Officer Biosecurity & Weeds, Department of Conservation, West Coast - Tai Poutini Conservancy, Hokitika (03 756 9100)



www.weedbusters.org.nz

The West Coast Regional Council does not accept liability for any advice given on this sheet regarding application of herbicides for pest plant control. The brand names listed imply neither endorsement of those brands, nor criticism of any other brands not listed.