

# Spanish Heath

## *Erica lusitanica*

**Progressive Control Plant under the  
West Coast Regional Pest Plant  
Management Strategy**



### **National Pest Plant Accord Status**

As of June 2011 Spanish Heath has been nominated as an addition to the 2008 National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA). It is also a listed pest plant in the Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, Wellington, Southland regions as well as being under surveillance on the West Coast. For more information refer to the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand website at [www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa)

### **Where has Spanish Heath come from?**

Spanish Heath is native to the countries of south-west Europe and was brought to New Zealand by the early settlers as a garden plant. It has long since escaped home gardens to thrive in many parts of the country, particularly where there are wet acid soils.

### **What does Spanish Heath look like?**

Spanish Heath is an erect woody perennial which grows to 2m or more tall on the West Coast. The shrubs are multi stemmed with main stems growing up to 15cm in diameter and new shoots being very hairy. Fragrant, light green, needle-like leaves (3-7mm long) grow in whorls around the stems. Masses of small, white to pink, bell-shaped flowers grow in clusters at the ends of the stems from March through to December. Flowering is followed by the formation of hairless seed capsules 3mm long containing many tiny seeds which are spread by wind, soil and water movement. The plants are tolerant of wet to dry conditions, heat and frosts, and acid or poor soils.



### **Why is Spanish Heath a Pest Plant?**

Spanish Heath is a vigorous invasive plant of roadsides and wasteland, particularly bare areas. It forms dense stands to the detriment of other species and will form a monoculture where it is not outgrown and shaded by taller species.

The plants are not readily grazed by animals, and whilst trimming, slashing or mowing will prevent flowering and seeding, they do will kill the plants.

If burnt, plants will re-sprout from the bottom of the stems and the many seeds will germinate on the bare land.

*Top right: Spanish Heath flowers in June [WCRC]*

*At left: Spanish Heath grows up to two metres high on the West Coast [WCRC]*

## What are the best methods of control?

Keep bare areas planted in preferred species to minimise wind-blown seed gaining a hold on any banks, cuttings or disturbed land. Adding lime to the acid soils preferred by the plant also slows down the vigour of its' growth but note that this may also be detrimental to native plants.

### **Manual Methods**

Hand pulling of very small plants is a good follow-up method after using herbicide treatment. However it can be laborious if plants have seeded previously. If there are large areas to control, slashing/trimming of flower head to prevent seeding is a good option, allowing time to be taken with the herbicide options. Take note that mowing small plants just changes their form to "bonsai" size forms of the plant!

### **Herbicide Methods**

There are two main options when working with stands of Spanish Heath: stump-swabbing or foliage spraying. Choose the option which best suits your situation.

- Stump-swabbing: cut down the stems (loppers or hand-saw) to 5cm above ground level and apply herbicide concentrate such as Glyphosate (Roundup, Roundup Renew, Glyphosate 360 etc) or Vigilant Gel. For disposal, the cut foliage will dry and burn well (use bigger stems for kindling)
- or/and dispose of to landfill.
- Spraying: apply 2,4-D Ethylhexylester Ester (e.g. Pasture Kleen, Relay) at the rate of 500ml /100L water on active spring growth.

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

### **Biocontrols**

There are no known biocontrols for Spanish Heath at present.

## Where can I get more help?

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

**Mary Trayes:** 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](http://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.*