

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)

Fact sheet

What do they look like?

Gorse is a spiny, densely branched woody leguminous shrub with many stems growing from ground level. It can grow up to 7m tall. Its leaves are small and grow from green spine-like twigs. Spines and leaves have a waxy coating and end in a sharp point. As gorse grows, the lower branches die but remain on the stems, such that older plants are covered with spiny dead brown branches lower down.



Gorse has large yellow pea flowers that grow singularly from the bases of the leaves. Flowers can be produced at all times of the year but usually appear in two distinct periods – spring and autumn. The flowers have a distinct coconut-like smell. Seed pods are oblong, hairy and contain two to six hard round seeds.

- Seed can be dispersed by ejection (up to 5m), soil/seed transport, stock, birds, ants and water
- The seed bank holds up to 40,000 seeds per m²

Why should gorse be controlled?

Gorse originated in Europe and was planted for hedges and ornamental plants. Since then it has spread across higher rainfall regions of southern Australia. It forms dense thickets that degrade pasture and native vegetation.

In Australia, gorse is now a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) due to its invasiveness, impacts, potential for spread and effects on socio-economic and environmental values. Impacts on agriculture include reduced stock carrying capacity, restricted stock and human access, harbouring feral animals and reduced land value. Gorse can form dense monoculture stands and out-compete native vegetation. Riparian zones are highly susceptible to invasion by gorse.

Gorse is also highly flammable and can greatly increase fire risk.



Gorse life cycle

- The plant flowers from 18 months old and can live for up to 30 years
- The seed is viable in the soil for up to 25 years

What are my responsibilities?

Gorse is declared under the *Landscape South Australia Act, 2019*. This means it is illegal to transport or sell this plant and all property owners have a responsibility to control gorse on their property. Residents who rent their properties also have obligations to control any gorse present. This also includes anyone who is leasing property unless other arrangements have been made.

What are the best ways to control gorse?

You need a long-term plan to eradicate gorse from a site. Combining physical control methods with the strategic use of herbicides is a reliable approach to prevent its spread, reduce its above-ground mass and kill regrowth.

As seed remains viable in the soil for long periods, a control time frame of 5 to 25 years is required. Annual follow up at all sites is essential.

Mechanical control

The aim of mechanical clearing is to reduce the above-ground mass of gorse before follow-up methods are applied. Physical control methods include earthmoving equipment, grubbing, root raking, mulching, crushing, and slashing.

Seedlings can be grubbed with a mattock, making sure all roots are removed or hand pulled in winter when the soil is wet.

Burning

Fire is an effective way to remove dead gorse after clearing or herbicide treatment. The heat can also kill some of the soil seed bank.

It is important to remember that burning also stimulates the germination of gorse seeds which can then be controlled by herbicides or heavy grazing once germination occurs.

Chemical control

Plants should be actively growing when applying spray-on herbicides. A dye can be added to aid in application.

Foliar spray: When spraying, all foliage must be covered.

Chemical formulation:

10L water + 3g of aminopyralid & metsulfuron-methyl + 20mls of wetter agent.

If spraying near waterways use Roundup Biactive at a rate of 1 litre per 100 litres of water.

Cut and swab: Cut stems horizontally no higher than 100mm, above ground level and immediately swab the stems with Vigilant II herbicide gel.

Do you have gorse?

If you think you have gorse on your property, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board staff can provide advice on control and management.

More information

Email: ep.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au
Phone: 08 8688 3200

www.landscape.sa.gov.au/ep