Scotch Broom

Western Invasive Plant Fact Sheet #1

Cytisus scoparius

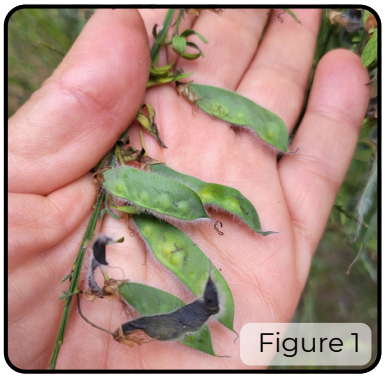


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Scan or Click for more management information

Quick Facts: Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is a perennial shrubby legume with small leaves and dark, ridged, evergreen stems. Scotch broom is native to western and central Europe and was originally planted for ornamental purposes and erosion control along rights-of-way.

It grows aggressively in grasslands and open forests, increasing the risk of wildfire. Scotch broom also releases chemicals that change the chemical composition of the soil to prevent native plants from germinating and establishing.

This plant is a problem in working forests, pastures, and associated agricultural lands. Scotch broom costs the Pacific Northwest economy tens of millions of dollars each year. In Oregon alone, Scotch broom is responsible for $47 million in lost timber production each year, while total potential impacts in Washington state reach over $142 million.

While it is tolerant of most conditions, it is commonly found in disturbed areas with dry, well-drained soils and full sun. This weed is an expensive problem to manage, especially in livestock grazing and forest systems. The seeds are toxic to livestock and horses. Effective control of this weed will require persistence over many years, and monitoring for seedlings is recommended.

Invasion Strategy: Scotch broom reproduces primarily from seed. Each plant can produce up to 10,000 seeds per year and these seeds can survive up to 40 years in the seed bank. The seed pods of this plant "pop" open and spray seeds up to 20 feet away from the mother plant. Seeds can start new infestations by traveling on the fur of wildlife, tires, boots, and equipment.

Identifying Features: Scotch broom is a long-lived, shrubby, densely branched plant with sparse, small leaves. The plant is deciduous and loses its leaves and flowers during the winter months; the stems are ridged and a green-black color.

- Leaves are small and sparse.
- Leaves are single or in groups of three
- Bright yellow pea-like flowers
- Small stems are deep green, rough and ridged
- Large stems are smooth and green-brown
- Seed pods turn from green to black/brown when mature
- No thorns

Scotch Broom *Cytisus scoparius*

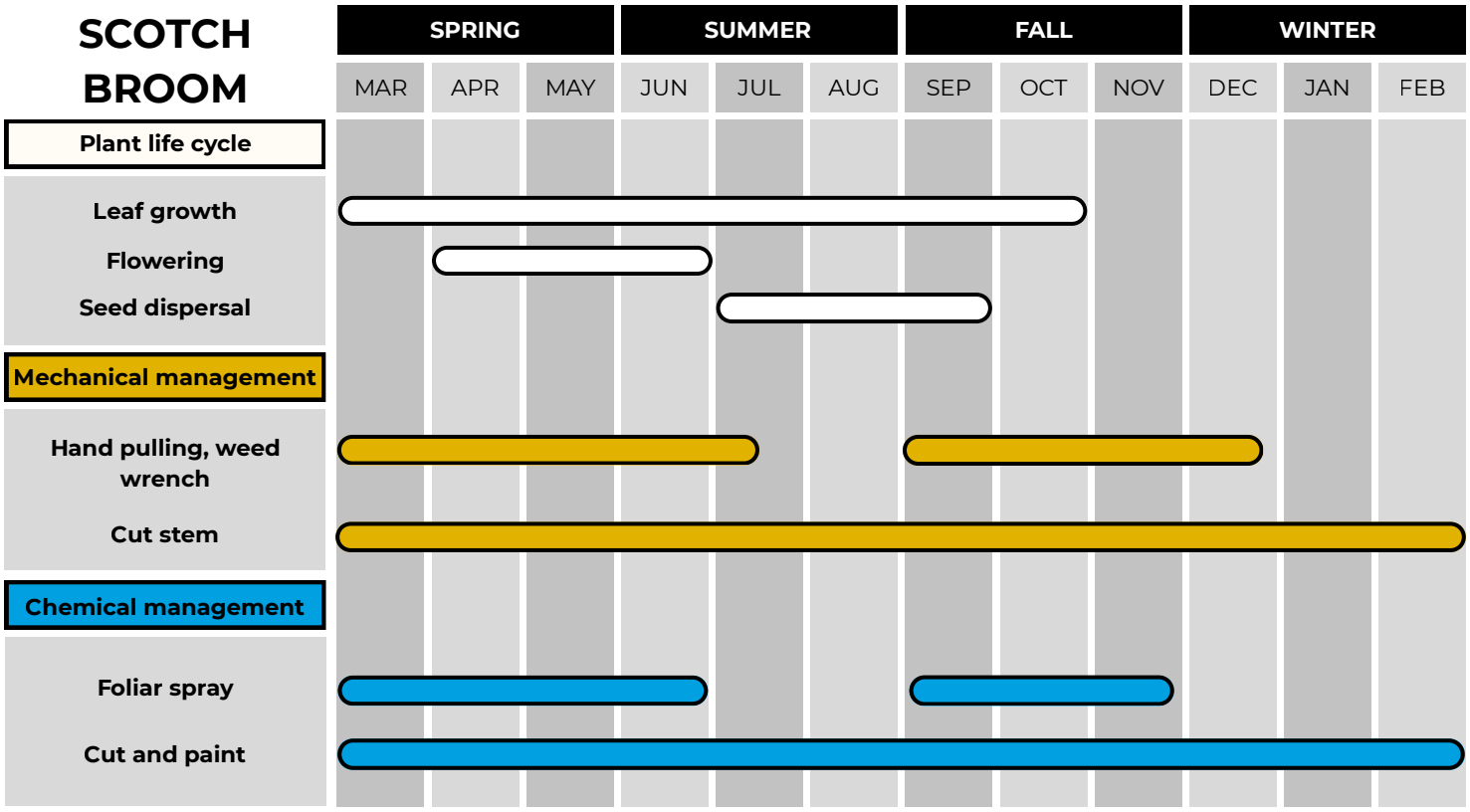


Table 1. This chart is based on USDA plant hardiness zone 7. Plant growth and treatment times vary by region.

Management Methods:

Mechanical - Hand pulling and using tools such as a Weed Wrench can effectively leverage plants out of the ground. Remove plants when soil is soft to avoid soil disturbance and ensure the taproot is fully removed. Plants with stem diameters larger than 2 inches can be cut and monitored for regrowth.

Biological - Two biological controls are used: the Scotch broom weevil (*Exapion fuscirostre)* and the Scotch broom bruchid (*Bruchidius villosus)*. These insects can reduce plant numbers.

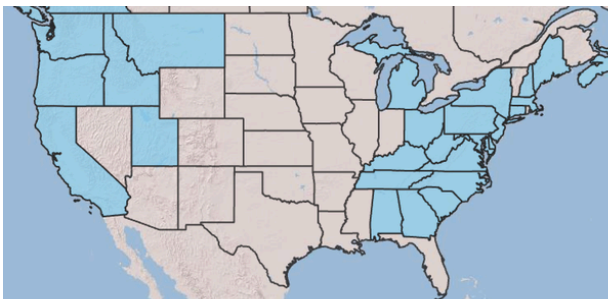
Chemical – Foliar spray and cut-and-paint are both effective. Retreatment of new growth in following years will be required.

Disclaimer - Selecting the best management method for this plant can be site- and context-specific. Check with your local USDA Service Center or University Extension agent to explore your options and determine what is most appropriate for your location and situation.

Management Information:

Disrupting the soil can increase seed set and propagation. Dispose of cut plant materials where they cannot resprout. If seeds are present, bag them and dispose of them in a landfill. Equipment should be cleaned after management.

Personal protective equipment is recommended when removing any invasive species, and especially when using herbicides. Always follow label instructions when using herbicide!



Species present Absent

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Scotch Broom *Cytisus scoparius*

Look-alike Species: Scotch broom resembles gorse, an invasive species. Because gorse is still establishing in the Pacific Northwest, it should be controlled wherever it is found.

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus)* is another invasive shrubby plant with green stems, small leaves, and yellow pea-like flowers. However, if differs from Scotch broom in the following ways:

- Gorse has long, green spines covering the plant
- Flowers may be present at any time of year; however Scotch broom blooms only in the summer
- New invasive species.

If you suspect gorse is on your property, contact your local soil and water conservation district, NRCS office, or check your local list of weeds that require eradication.

Figure 5

Figure 6

References and Additional Reading:

- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board. Scotch broom. [Identification and management information].
- Oregon Flora Project. Volume 2, Scots broom. [Identification and phenology].
- Oregon Department of Agriculture. Class B Noxious Weed: Scotch broom [biological control and impacts]
- Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbook. Broom, Scotch (Cytisus scoparius), French (Genista monspessulana), Portuguese (Cytisus striatus), and Spanish (Spartium junceum) [chemical management]

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- Figure 6: City of Portland
- Range map: USDA PLANTS Database
- Supplemental photo 1: City of Portland Oregon
- Supplemental photo 2: Oregon State University Extension Service

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