

WEED CONTROL: SCOTCH BROOM

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Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), a Washington State Class B noxious weed, is a woody, deciduous shrub that can reach up to 10' in height. This member of the pea (*Fabaceae*) family has yellow flowers with the typical, irregular pea-flower shape. The dark green, erect branches contain chlorophyll, so the plants continue to photosynthesize through the winter after leaves have dropped (while many native species are dormant). Leaves have three, entire leaflets. Scotch broom reproduces mainly by seeds, which remain viable for up to 60 years! Fruits are flattened pods that blacken in late summer and dehisce with an audible pop when mature, ejecting the seeds many feet away from the mother plant. Seedlings emerge in spring and fall. This species superficially resembles Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*) and gorse (*Ulex europaeus*).

Scotch broom grows so vigorously that it smothers native vegetation. The seeds are toxic to livestock as well as humans. Scotch broom may increase the frequency and intensity of wildfires, and it can chemically alter the soil over time. It was originally introduced as an ornamental and was later included in erosion control plantings. Scotch broom most frequently occurs on disturbed sites with full sun, and commonly colonizes roadsides and construction sites.

Scotch broom can be controlled manually by uprooting the plants, taking care to remove as much roots as possible to prevent resprouting. Tree pullers, patented tools made in Canada (www.pullerbear.com), are invaluable. These clever tools come in a variety of sizes and configurations. Some conservation districts and weed boards loan out weed wrenches, which are similar tools that have been discontinued. When wrenching extremely large, multi-stemmed plants, saw off at least one stem or a portion of the height to improve access to the base. Pulling Scotch broom will disturb the soil, which makes seeds in the soil germinate. Following weeding, mulch with 3–4" of wood chips and plant with appropriate native plants to compete with new seedlings. If mulching is not feasible, try to disturb soil as little as possible.

Pulling can be used in combination with cutting methods. King County has found that mature plants with a diameter of greater than 2" are least likely to resprout after cutting. Large plants can be cut with a brush cutter or tractor mower, after uprooting the younger seedlings. Plants should be cut as close as possible to the ground. For greater control, concentrated herbicide may be applied to the cut stump soon after the plant has been cut off. Herbicides most commonly used for this type of application include triclopyr ester and 2,4-D. Glyphosphate and triclopyr have been found to effectively control Scotch broom through foliar applications. Herbicides should be applied once in the spring and again in the fall while the plants are still actively growing. Always thoroughly research all options before spraying and follow label directions.

Any method of Scotch broom control will require frequent maintenance for several years, because of the prodigious quantity of viable seeds that persist in the soil for years. Persistence and consistency are critical for success.

More information is available through King County's excellent *Best Weed Management Practices*: www.kingcounty.gov/environment/animalsAndPlants/noxious-weeds/weed-control-practices/bmp.aspx and The Nature Conservancy's Global Invasive Species Team: tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/cytiscop.html.