



Government
of South Australia

WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

ENGLISH BROOM



Closeup of flowers and unripe seed pods



Typical growth of English broom



English broom invading forest



A variant with red-tinted flowers

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English broom, *Cytisus scoparius*, also called Scotch broom, is a shrub introduced from Europe as a hedge plant and ornamental in colonial times. By the end of the 19th century, English broom had become enough of a nuisance to be declared a noxious weed in some States. As it is an invader of native vegetation and forms long-lasting seed banks, it is important to keep English broom off clean properties or to recognise and destroy new infestations before they become established.

Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- not known
Northern pastoral	- absent
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- possible isolated patches
Murray Mallee	- isolated to roadsides in higher rainfall areas
South East	- isolated patches around Mt Gambier
Central region	- scattered heavy infestations in paddocks and roadsides

Impacts

English broom establishes readily on disturbed sites, but dense native vegetation is only invaded if there has been a disturbance such as timber thinning, road construction or damage by animals. Once established, English broom will dominate the other shrub vegetation, smothering even large plants and preventing establishment of new plants. The broom thickets will also harbour vermin and increase the fire hazard.

Extracts from this plant have been used in tanning processes and as medicines. Branches have been used for brooms (hence the name) and thatching. Other varieties of brooms are commercially available in Australia as garden ornamentals.

Recognition

English broom is an erect shrub to 3m high. The stems are woody, densely branched, dark green in colour with ridges along their length. The leaves are small, occurring singularly or in clusters at nodes along the stems. Each leaf has 3 oval leaflets: the middle one is longer than the other two. However, the leaves are shed very early and the "foliage" of English broom consists mainly of the green erect branchlets.

Flowers are pea-shaped, about 2 cm long and bright yellow in colour (with red markings in the cultivar 'Andreanus'). They occur singly or as pairs in the axils of leaves towards the ends of branches. The fruit is a flat, brown or black pod, hairy on the edges, to 5cm long and 1cm wide containing 6 to 22 seeds. The seeds are yellowish brown, shiny, rounded, flat, 3-4mm long and 2mm wide.

Biology

English broom will tolerate a wide range of soil types but requires some sort of disturbance in order to establish. As a legume, it fixes nitrogen from the air.

English broom reproduces from seed only. Seeds are hard-coated and can remain in the soil for 10 years or more before germinating, building up a large seed bank. Germination occurs mostly in autumn. Seedling development is slow during the first year and plants do not flower before the age of 2 years. Flowering occurs from October to December and pods ripen in summer, bursting noisily on hot days to eject the seeds for a distance of several metres. Leaves drop from the current year's growth during summer, and the plant then remains leafless until the following spring. The branchlets of English broom remain green for about three years and compensate for the loss of the leaves as they are photosynthetic. Plants may live for up to 20 years.

Further Information:

Hosking, J.R., Sheppard, A.W. & Smith, J.M. (2000) Best Practice Management Guide 2. Broom. CRC for Weed Management Systems.

Parsons, W.T. & Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd edn. Inkata Press.

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For more advice on recognising and controlling English broom, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board:



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