



Government
of South Australia

WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

GORSE



Stems of gorse with flowers and spines



Closeup of gorse flowers



Dense growth of gorse bush

GORSE



Government
of South Australia

Gorse, *Ulex europaeus*, is a spiny shrub introduced from Europe as a hedge plant. It is sometimes called furze or whin. Because gorse is a prolific seeder, it is important to keep it off clean properties and destroy new plants before they become established.

Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- very scattered infestations on southern EP
Northern pastoral	- not present
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- common on roadsides and watercourse in the south
Murray Mallee	- isolated outbreaks in the higher rainfall area to the west
South East	- rare in the north, scattered in the south
Central region	- widespread in the higher rainfall areas

Impacts

Gorse is a major problem in native vegetation and forestry where plants compete strongly with young trees and thickets, increasing the fire hazard along the edges of plantations. It will also grow in pasture paddocks, resulting in lower carrying capacity and providing harbour for vermin. In the long term, soils under gorse become more acid and lose nutrients.

Gorse has been seen as a good hedge or windbreak because of its dense spiny growth. It also produces much pollen which can be valuable to the bee keeping industry.

Recognition

An erect, many branched shrub which can reach 4m tall and 3m across. Young growth is green and older shoots become brown. The stems are woody when mature and covered with spines up to 5cm long. Leaves are dark green, hairy, narrow, spine-like and 1-3cm long. They are evenly spaced along the stems in clusters. Flowers are bright yellow, pea-shaped and about 2cm long. They are produced in clusters mainly near the end of branches. The fruit is a dark pod, 1-2cm long, covered in dense hair and containing 2-6 seeds. Seeds are green-brown, smooth and shiny, 3mm long and triangular in shape with a paler aril. Gorse bushes have no distinct taproot; the root system is dense but consists mostly of shallow fibrous feeding roots.

Biology

Gorse is not restricted to any particular soil type, but is most competitive on poor, alkaline soils. It requires at least 500 mm annual rainfall.

Gorse depends on seed for reproduction. Flowering occurs during autumn and spring, giving two seed crops per year.

Ripe seeds burst from the pods when heated by the sun, and may also be moved by ants. Birds may spread the seeds further and gorse plants are often found growing under trees where birds have perched. Earthworks and vehicles can also move seeds.

Seed can remain dormant but viable for 75 years or longer, building up a huge seed bank in the soil.

Seeds mostly germinate in autumn or spring; mass germinations can occur after fire. The seedlings grow rapidly, but they are readily grazed by animals and sensitive to frost. Plants develop spines by the fourth month, and may flower when they are 18 months old.

Further Information:

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

Copyright ©2001 Animal and Plant Control Commission of SA

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



ANIMAL AND PLANT
CONTROL COMMISSION
SOUTH AUSTRALIA