

Scotch Broom

By Laura Black



Scientific Name: *Cytisus scoparius*, commonly known as Scotch Broom, Scots Broom, or Broom.

Background on Broom:

Native to Europe, scotch broom was brought to Vancouver Island in 1850 by Captain Walter Grant. He planted a few seeds in Sooke, at the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

Since then, Scotch broom has spread rapidly and densely across Vancouver Island, adjacent islands, and the Pacific Northwest. It quickly takes over disturbed areas along roadsides, railways, and forest roads; and quickly covers fields, meadows, and any deforested areas. It covers large expanses under power line corridors.

Key Features:



Stems

An upright, tap-rooted evergreen shrub growing from 1-3 metres. Stems are rigid, woody, green to greenish-brown and are prominently five-angled.

Leaves

Upper leaves are simple and unstaked while lower leaves are staked and comprised of three oval leaflets.

Flowers



Bright yellow pea-like flowers, that sometimes have red markings in the middle, bloom from March to June.

Fruit

The flat, hairy, green seed pods form from June to early September.



A single broom plant can produce up to 18,000 seeds, which remain viable in the soil for 30-40 years. When exposed to sunlight, broom seeds sprout!

As the pods mature, they turn black and eventually split and spiral forcing them to burst open dispersing seeds in all directions.

Removal and Disposal:

To be successful, the first step in removing scotch broom is to have a plan for disposal before you start to cut. A few options to explore are:

- Place the broom in bags or covered loads marked as 'Invasive Species' and take it to your local landfill.
- Contact your local municipality to see if they offer options for invasive plant species disposal.

Note: Burning is not an effective control or disposal method as broom seeds will germinate following a burn.

Removal Methods:

Mechanical

There are several mechanical techniques to use to help remove and control the spread of scotch broom.

- Pull small broom plants (smaller than the thickness of a pencil) by hand when the soil is moist.

- For terrains such as sand, pebbles, or large rocks; pull the mature plants using a hand-held excavating tool. This could also work for hard-to-reach places.
- When grown in soil, cut broom plants greater than a half-inch at the base or root collar. This helps prevent seed germination by not disturbing the soil.
- If you're attempting to deplete or lessen the seed bank in a smaller infestation; allow the seeds to germinate then pull the baby plant out, roots and all, in moist soil.

When protecting Garry Oak Ecosystems from scotch broom it's important to cut instead of pulling the plant to not disturb the soil. This is encouraged not only to prevent seed germination in these sensitive areas but also to protect the growth of our native plant species such as; Camas (*Camassia quamash*), shooting star (*Primula Sect. Dodecatheon*) or Giant White Fawn Liliy (*Erythronium oregonum*) to name a few. Cutting the plant is also important in Archeological Sites.



Prevent cut broom plants from re-growing by cutting the plant just below the ground surface or root collar.

Try not to cut broom once it has produced seeds - you'll likely help the plant spread seeds with the disturbance.

Chemical

Avoid pesticides & herbicides! Avoid using pesticides that may harm people, pets and wildlife and cause pollution. Check with your municipality for regulations about pesticide use in your area.

Restoration:

Be ready to replace broom with **native** vegetation. Bare, exposed soil is a prime breeding ground for more broom. Rapidly growing native or non-invasive plants will help shade out broom seedlings that might spring up after you've removed a broom monoculture.

A few **native non-invasive** alternatives to plant instead of Scotch Broom include:

- *Ribes sanguineum* (Red Flowering Currant)
- *Vaccinium ovatum* (Evergreen Huckleberry)
- *Cornus nuttallii* (Pacific Dogwood)
- *Mahonia aquifolium* (Oregon Grape)
- *Holodiscus discolor* (Ocean Spray)

- *Rubus spectabilis* (Salmon Berry)
- *Rubus parviflorus* (Thimble Berry)
- *Rosa nutkana* (Nootka Rose)

Suggested Tools & Equipment for Removal:

- Loppers
- Small pruners
- Reciprocating saw or a hand-held saw for large trunk-like broom.
- Gloves
- Knee pad for comfort

Many local organizations loan broom removal tools and visibility vests to their volunteers.

Cautions:

! Scotch broom is highly **flammable**.

“Scotch Broom is a volatile flash fuel – particularly with the mature plants. The presence of Scotch broom will increase a wildfire’s fuel load and escalate the fire’s intensity, compromising fire situations and making them more difficult to fight.”

Terry Peters, Fire Chief of Powell River B.C.

! Scotch Broom is **toxic** to livestock.

To report an invasive plant or weed of concern:

- SMARTPHONE APP: Use the Report-A-Weed app:
www.reportaweedbc.ca
- ONLINE: Report to a provincial Invasive Plant Specialist: www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species
- CALL 1-888-933-3722

Resources for *Cytisus scoparius*:

Islands Trust: <https://islandstrust.bc.ca/conservancy/protect-nature/care-for-your-land/protect-against-invasives/scotch-broom/#:~:text=Scotch%20broom%20is%20an%20invasive,clearings%2C%20roadsides%20and%20hydro%20corridors>

Invasive Species Council of BC:

<https://bcinvasives.ca/invasives/scotch-broom/>

Broombusters Invasive Plant Society:

<https://www.broombusters.org/about-broom/>

CRD. How to Safely Dispose of Invasive Plant Species:

<https://www.crd.bc.ca/education/concerns/invasive-species>

Field Guide to Noxious Weeds and Other Selected Invasive Plants of BC:

<https://www.bcinvasives.ca/resources/publications/field-guide-to-noxious-weeds-and-other-selected-invasive-plants-of-BC>