

BROOM

Cytisus scoparius



Photo: Kame115 Wikimedia Commons



Photo: 4028mdk09 Wikimedia Commons

Why is it a weed?

It out-competes useful pasture species and is a prolific weed species.

Where is it found? All over NZ

Is it toxic? No

What is it telling you? Broom is a nitrogen-fixer so its presence indicates soil is low in fertility.



Photo: Willow Wikimedia Commons



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MILTON MUNRO



So I had bit of fun with my three budding agronomists last weekend. Close to our house in the beautiful sunny south (slight exaggeration there), we have a patch of wasteland on either side of the railway tracks. This area gets cleared out every few years but one weed always comes back to colonise the area: broom.

As I wrote this column, the broom in this patch had just ripened to the point when the seed heads were about to explode. This wasteland weed is providing me an excellent teaching tool in explaining the different methods plants use to disperse their seeds and it's also a lot of fun to go along and help coax a few explosions.

Broom or common broom is a common perennial weed infesting most parts of New Zealand. The Mediterranean native has spread around the world and is considered a noxious pest in parts of the US, Australia, India and New Zealand. Controlling broom in New Zealand has an

MILTON MUNRO is a soil and plant scientist for rural supply company PGG Wrightson. He looks at common pasture weeds you'll find on your block and how to deal with them.

annual cost of approximately \$100 million for the forestry and farming industries.

Broom belongs to the Fabaceae family or legume family of plants. Other notable members of this family include beans, peas, peanuts, lupines and gorse, another noxious weed. It is an almost leafless woody shrub that can grow up to 1-3 metres tall. It can strike in the soil almost all year round and is capable of germinating and thriving in even the coldest temperatures. In the spring and summer of its second year, following germination, it begins to produce its distinctive flowers. These small (2-3cm) vibrant yellow flowers cover the upper parts of the plant.

From late summer onward green seed pods form and develop. These seed pods ripen and turn brown and finally black before bursting with an enormous explosive force. This generates quite an audible crack and propels the seed a fair distance away, helping the plant to spread and colonise further.

How to control broom

This can be difficult to achieve. The seed it produces is very hardy and capable of surviving long periods of time in the soil before germinating, not to mention it has a novel way of spreading the seed far and wide.

Non-chemical options

Cutting and burning can be an effective means of controlling it but only if

favourable species are introduced into the bare areas and maintained.

Effective competition from ryegrass and clover is a great way to keep broom out.

Chemical options

Chemical control can be useful, especially in inaccessible areas, and the best product I've found to use is Tordon Brushkiller XT. This product is very hard on broom while not affecting grass growth, although it is also pretty hard on clover.

The best control comes from spraying smaller plants (less than 3m tall) in spring and early summer while the broom plants small leaves are still present.

A sweeping revelation

The word 'broom' came from broom. In the 15th century the broom plant was used to sweep the house. The broom plant used was called a besom (a word meaning a bundle of sticks or a broom plant tied to a pole) but gradually people started calling the besom a broom. The name stuck and continues to this day. Fascinating!

DO YOU NEED HELP WITH A WEED PROBLEM?

If anyone has a request for a particular weed they would like to know more about please don't hesitate to let Milton know: mmunro@pggwrightson.co.nz