



# Gorse

**FROM NOW** until late autumn, I'll be busy walking pastures for clients, condition scoring and advising on their regrassing plans.

While I am travelling, I notice the bright yellow flowers of gorse. I don't have any issues with it on my block, but most of the hills around my area have got a gorse problem.

Gorse is one of the worst invasive weeds in NZ's hill country. It's also an amazing success story of colonisation.

In the early 1800s, rural supply stores sold gorse seeds to early European settlers to plant as hedgerows, a way to create cheap fences and shelter for livestock. Gorse is also a leguminous plant that 'fixes' nitrogen, improving soil fertility.

However, New Zealand's climate and naturally acidic soils allowed gorse to rampage across many areas. In a study in 1984, it was estimated over 500,000ha of agricultural land was occupied by gorse, at an estimated loss of production of \$22 million. Approximately \$27 million was spent on control by the forestry and farming industries.

Gorse plants flower in their third year, producing 500-36,000 seeds per square metre. The seeds remain viable for up to 30 years in the soil. The explosive nature of the seed capsule distributes the seed around the plant. They are also moved to new areas when they get caught in animal fur/fleece.

The plants form dense spiky bushes which are avoided by livestock, reducing the amount of pasture available. This also allows it to spread unchallenged and colonise large areas of farmland.



### Why is it a weed?

Invasive and colonises pastures and bare land.

### Where is it found?

Most of NZ

### Is it toxic?

No

### Other uses

Great bee food, firewood, nitrogen-fixing

### How to control it

There are many biological control agents in New Zealand, including a gorse spider mite, gorse seed weevil, and a number of moth and thrip species. These can cause serious growth suppression, but none have been successful at controlling it.

A good fertiliser programme and encouraging good quality grass, prevents gorse germinating. It prefers acidic soils so lifting the pH with lime also helps. Grazing goats or sheep is another good tactic as they will graze off seedlings.

You can also use a combination of chemical sprays, cutting, mulching and burning, but any form of gorse control will always be difficult, and ongoing.



### Correction

I may have caused some confusion when writing about two weeds with the same common name, tarweed, in the December issue. The one I was referring to – *Parentucellia viscosa* (tarweed, yellow glandweed, yellow bartisia) – has no documented toxicity. However anecdotal comments suggest large amounts fed in hay can cause gut upsets in horses. I apologise for any confusion.



### About Gary

Gary Bosley works as PGG Wrightson's North Island technical specialist in agronomy. He and his family live on a 4ha lifestyle block south-east of Auckland.