

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)



Falkland Islands Government
Department of Agriculture
Farmfile Note

History

Gorse is a native of mainland Europe and the British Isles and was one of the first plants to be imported into the Falkland Islands, being imported before 1848 (Moore, 1968) to be used as cattle fencing and shelter, particularly in whitegrass pastures and around settlements.

Gorse is now considered to be an invasive threat to many areas where it no longer holds a productive agricultural use. It reduces access to areas, can become home to pests such as hares, rats and cats as well as becoming unsightly in areas where conservation value is important.

Gorse was once kept under control through the use of labour to trim and tidy hedges. These days due to time constraints this may not always happen.

Gorse—the weed

Gorse is a prickly, perennial, evergreen legume which, if left uncontrolled, can grow to a height of more than 3 m. It produces deep and extensive roots. Its stems and leaves are prickly, ending in a sharp spine. The plant produces huge numbers of brown to black seeds in grey hairy pods, each pod holding three or four seeds. The seeds have a hard, water-resistant coating which allows them to remain dormant in the soil for up to 30 years.

The small dark green leaves are stiff and covered with a waxy coat, which reduces water loss. Together with its deep root system, enables gorse to flourish in areas with low rainfall.

Where is it

Gorse is presently found throughout both East and West Falkland, as well as on most of the inhabited outer islands. It is predominantly found around settlements, but can also be found out in camp, particularly along roadsides, near old corrals, or near beaches and rivers where the seed may have washed up. In some cases, where gorse has not been controlled, it now completely covers several hectares of productive ground.

How it spreads

Gorse plants will start to flower after they are about 1 year old, these yellow flowers can be present at any point during the active growing season, however from October to December the bushes will flower vigorously. In a dense stand up to 6 million seeds per hectare can be produced in a growing season. On a hot summers day you may hear the seed pods cracking as the seeds explode out up to a distance of 5 metres. This is the main method of dispersal, and it shows how gorse can form dense thickets in a relatively short period of time. Gorse can also be spread by animals (in sheep wool), by machine, water or soil.—so practising good hygiene when dealing with gorse is important.



What to Do

Gorse, once established, can take a long time to get under control. The best thing is to prevent it from spreading by limiting the flowering opportunities it has, or at least reducing the plants ability to seed.

There are several control methods available, however whichever method is employed, follow up in future years is equally important (see overleaf for control methods).

If using herbicide, the best time to do this is while the plants are actively growing post flowering.

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Methods of Control

Manual and Mechanical Removal

If stands of gorse are not too dense and mature, ploughing or rotary slashing can be an effective approach. After ploughing, seedlings and regrowth will require a follow up spot spray with herbicide. Slashing will need to be repeated, probably several times, interspersed with hard grazing by sheep, as well as possibly some follow-up spraying as necessary.

Cutting smaller gorse with a strimmer or chainsaw and treating the stumps with herbicide, although labour intensive, is very cost-effective for isolated plants or small stands. Large individual gorse bushes can be successfully cut off just above ground level and the stumps swabbed with herbicide.

Burning

Burning can be useful in combination with herbicides, but is rarely effective when used by itself. Burning will not kill existing seeds within the ground and even the burnt stump can re-grow. Regrowth should be controlled with herbicide.



Herbicide

Stump Swabbing

Cut gorse stumps as low to the ground as possible, and then spray all of the above-ground stump within 1-2 minutes, ensuring the fresh-cut surface is thoroughly treated. Follow up for any regrowth or new seedlings at least every 2 years.

The DoA recommends the following herbicides (active ingredients).

- ◆ **Vigilant Gel®** applied 3-5mm thick across cut stump
- ◆ **Metsulfuron-Methyl @ 5g/L** water applied, apply liberally to cut stump and to ground level with brush
- ◆ **Triclopyr @ 1 part** Triclopyr to 20 parts water or diesel, apply liberally to cut stump and to ground level with brush
- ◆ **Triclopyr/Picloram @ 1 part** tri/pic mix to 20 parts water or diesel, apply liberally to cut stump and to ground level with brush
- ◆ Add **Organo-silicone** penetrant @1ml/L water

Back Pack Spraying

For small to medium size infestations, the use of a backpack sprayer is a good option. This allows a reasonable quantity of chemical to be distributed in a short period of time.

When spraying, full coverage is important, ensure that you cover all sides of the plant, from the middle right to the tips. Spray to the point of runoff to ensure the plant is fully coated.



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DoA Recommended rates

- ◆ **Metsulfuron-Methyl @ 5g/10L**
- ◆ **Triclopyr @ 60-90ml/10L**
- ◆ **Triclopyr/Picloram mix @ 60-90ml/10L**
- ◆ Add 10ml of **Organo-silicone** penetrant/10L of water

Hose and Gun Spraying

For larger infestations, the use of a higher pressure sprayer may be useful along with a good length of hose. This will enable you to cover more ground and spray further into dense thickets. Again, ensuring complete coverage is essential in order to obtain complete control. As is ensuring follow up treatment if required.

DoA Recommended rates

- ◆ **Metsulfuron-Methyl @ 25g/100L** water
- ◆ **Triclopyr @ 300ml/100L** water
- ◆ **Triclopyr/Picloram mix @ 300ml/100L** water
- ◆ Add 100ml of **Organo-silicone** penetrant /100L water.

Talk to your supplier for options and brands available

For more information, contact the DoA on 27355

References:

www.ravensdown.co.nz agrochemical label pdfs: sourced 8 March 2018

www.environment.gov.au weed control b:sourced 8 March 2018