



BONNER COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS

NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681
<http://bonnercounty.us/noxious-weeds>

Weed of the month

By Chase Youngdahl

As we flip the calendars to March and close in on spring, spring activities begin to come to mind. As the eventual trips to the nursery take place to pick out that perfect ornamental for your landscape project, I urge you to refrain from selecting any broom species that may be available. Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is on Idaho's Noxious Weeds List, and I will present more details on this later in the article, but there are hundreds of brooms that are not listed....yet. Four genera of brooms, *Cytisus*, *Genista*, *Spartium* and *Chamaecytisus* [including all species and varieties within those genera] were presented to the Idaho legislature by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture for consideration to be added to the Idaho Noxious Weeds list. According to research performed by University of Idaho plant specialists, species and varieties falling under the above mentioned broom genera all create an equal threat to our environment and produce viable seed for generations—there is no sterile hybrid. Nursery suppliers have periodically shipped various brooms to local nursery retailers, such as *Cytisus praecox*, *Cytisus purgans*, *Genista* species and *Spartium* species. These are nearly impossible to distinguish from one another unless they are in the flowering stage, and in some cases can only be positively identified in the lab.

It made sense to tackle this issue by way of adjustment to the Idaho Noxious Weeds List to prevent all broom shipments to Idaho. The proposed additions of the four broom genera passed the House Ag Committee, and subsequently the Senate Ag Committee. If both aggregate bodies of the legislature approve the recommendation from committee, the process will be finalized and these genera with all associated species will officially be prohibited plants in the state of Idaho. The current legislative session is still in progress as I write this so I can't provide the conclusion, but there is optimism that it will pass.

This brings me to the weed of the month, **Scotch broom** (*Cytisus scoparius*). It is a hardy evergreen perennial shrub that infests approximately 300 acres in Bonner County, and as I mentioned earlier, is on the Idaho Noxious Weeds List. In the pea family with brilliant yellow pea-like flowers that bloom from mid-May to mid-June in North Idaho, and produces seed pods resembling that of a pea pod. At maturity these pods snap open and authoritatively release seeds that can remain viable in the soil for 60-80 years! Stems are woody and angular with very small leaves that drop around the time deciduous vegetation drops their leaves, sometimes earlier depending on stress factors.



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Scotch broom can grow up to 10 feet tall and if left alone, clusters of it can create an impenetrable stand that wildlife and livestock will typically not navigate through. There is also increased fire danger, as it produces resins that burn long and hot. It grows up the entire Pacific coast from Mexico to British Columbia, with the most concentrated infestations being along the Interstate-5 corridor in Washington, Oregon and Northern California. Pastures, vacant lots, forest sites, orchards, roadsides and utility transmission lines are all susceptible areas. Mechanical removal of seedlings and small plants is effective if the entire root is extracted, by hand or with a woody weed pulling tool in the spring when soils are moist. A biological control agent is available, *Bruchidius villosus*, a seed feeding beetle. The most effective herbicides for control are Triclopyr products, with trade names including Garlon 3A®, Vastlan® and Crossbow®—the latter of which also contains 2,4-D ester. Use these at a rate of 3-4 quarts per acre along with a silicone surfactant and apply anytime high temperatures range from 60-80 degrees—adequate spray volume to ensure full coverage on each plant is very important to achieve a successful treatment. Another control option is a cut-stump treatment where the plants are sawed off at or near ground level and concentrated Triclopyr is wiped or brushed on to the stumps—this is a good method for situations where herbicide overspray could damage ornamentals in close proximity, especially for plants that are too large to hand pull. Always read and follow herbicide labels.

Bonner County has taken an aggressive approach in controlling Scotch broom as it appears, and also took proactive measures by gathering initial information to back up a proposal to add the four genera of equally invasive brooms to Idaho's Noxious Weeds List—a process that began two years ago. It is important that nursery businesses and growers are aware of issues that brooms present and also be proactive by not selling/purchasing shrubs labeled as any kind of broom; this ties directly in to prevention, which is always the best control method for weeds. Contact your county noxious weeds office for any updates or additional information.