

# APB INFONOTE

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## GORSE



1. Mature plant
  2. Seedling
  3. Infestation
  4. Flowers
- (Photos 2-4:  
Robyn Knox)





# GORSE

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## **What you should know about gorse**

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) is also sometimes called furze or whin. It is a legume (Papilionaceae). Gorse is a native of Europe and North Africa and is widespread in hill country in north America, western Europe, New Zealand, Tasmania and Victoria. It was originally introduced to Western Australia as an

ornamental hedge plant, but soon spread to become a weed in south coastal districts. It is a declared plant throughout WA as well as South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. Gorse may not be grown and you must destroy any gorse plants found on your property.

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## **Why gorse matters to you**

Gorse rapidly forms dense, impenetrable thickets which restrict grazing and provide refuge for rabbits. Unless controlled it can

smother newly-planted trees. In summer gorse may be a fire hazard and livestock may injure themselves on the sharp thorns.

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## **What you should look for**

- Gorse forms a spiny shrub often 2 metres and occasionally up to 3.5 metres high and wide, spreading in thickets.
- It has stiff highly branched stems which are dark green when young and turn brown as they age.
- The leaves are hardly recognizable as leaves. They are hairy, narrow and spine-like ranging from 20 to 30 mm long. There are no leaf-stalks (petioles). The stems also have short branchlets which end in spines.
- The plant appears to be completely covered in green spines.
- Gorse seedlings have true leaves. These are trifoliate (clover-like) and spineless.
- Gorse has numerous fragrant yellow pea-type flowers, mainly clustered on short stalks near the ends of the branches. Flowering takes place mainly from September to January.
- The fruit is a dark hairy pod about 10-15 mm long, containing several flattened olive coloured seeds about 3 mm in diameter.
- Most gorse roots are shallow with a few deeper roots, but no taproot.

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## **Why gorse might succeed in WA**

Gorse grows on a wide range of soil types but is most often found on infertile acid soils, disturbed or poor quality grazing land. It requires a high rainfall climate and cannot withstand severe frost. Gorse is a long-lived perennial plant reproducing from seed. Seedlings germinate in the autumn and spring and grow rapidly. Flowering begins when the bush is about 18 months old. It produces large numbers of seed pods. When dry the seed pods eject the seed up to five metres from the parent bush, slowly forming thickets as the seedlings germinate. Seed may remain viable

in the soil for 25 years or more, leading to a massive seed bank which may exceed 100 million viable seeds per hectare. Heat is necessary to break seed dormancy. Removing mature bushes usually stimulates a thick growth of seedlings because the seed is exposed to sunlight. Low branches which touch damp soil may take root forming new plants. Gorse spreads over longer distances by means of the seeds that can be carried internally by birds and livestock or stuck to clothes or vehicles.

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## **What you can do about it**

If you see a plant which could be gorse check it out. Destroy any gorse plants found on your property.

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## **Where to find out more**

For further information on gorse contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth 6151. Telephone (09) 368 3472 or the nearest country office of the APB or the Department of Agriculture.

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