PLANT PEST CONTROL

LAND PLANT PESTS

Gorse: *Ulex europaeus*

Why are we worried?

Gorse is very difficult to get rid of once established. It forms dense stands which sheep and cattle generally do not penetrate as the spines protect plants from browsing. Hard-coated seeds will last in the soil for many years, so reversion to gorse can occur at any time unless careful management of the pastures are maintained on previously infested areas.

What does it look like?

- Gorse is a deep rooted, woody plant which grows up to four metres. Young plants are generally dark green with a shrub form.
- When mature it has thick stems and develops a canopy, allowing stock access underneath.
- The small green leaves are hard spines, providing excellent defence.
- Bright yellow flowers are produced in autumn and spring. The hard coated seeds are spread up to two metres by an explosive opening of the pods and can lie dormant in the soil for many years before sprouting.

Where is it found?

Gorse is a legume which spreads rapidly on low fertility sites, but is equally able to spread on high fertility areas. It can be found in any area in Hawke's Bay but is particularly common north of Napier.

What's the best way to control the plant?

There are four ways to control gorse:

- biological control
- chemical spray
- mechanical clearing
- stock management.

Effective control generally requires a combination of two or more, and long term management is essential.

Biological control is likely to be successful in the future. Noxious Plants Officers are working with Landcare Research to assess the effectiveness of a range of biological

ET:PC:PP18:GE:Feb 1996

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agents. Those appearing effective are being spread as they become available but it will take 10 to 15 years for results to become obvious.

Chemical spraying is the main method of control with a range of registered herbicides available. The type of chemical depends on the time of the year and the stage of plant growth, so advice should be obtained from chemical representatives or Noxious Plants Officers before any spraying programme starts. Commonly used chemicals are: Tordon NF, Grazon, Escort, Roundup, and Trounce. Tordon 2G can be used to control isolated plants. It is essential manufacturers' recommendations be followed and all safety precautions taken.

Mechanical clearing or burning is often used to clear dense stands. This generally results in large numbers of seeds germinating in the disturbed ground. These seedlings can be controlled with two to three years of continuous cropping before a return to pasture or with intensive grazing. But this must be very carefully controlled with intensive grazing within six weeks of the seedlings emerging, or spines will develop. Continued management is needed to ensure no seedlings survive to the spiny leaf stage.

When burning, best results are obtained if a herbicide is applied beforehand. This generates a hotter fire, resulting in a better kill, and some chemical will also have moved into the root system. Careful stock management is needed after burning to ensure fleeces are not downgraded through blackening.

Stock management is also useful. Goat grazing is used as a control measure, mainly north of Napier. Goats help to control new plants and trim existing bushes but generally they do not destroy mature plants unless the they are grazed intensively in small paddocks.

For further information

If you think you may have this plant pest on your property, please contact the Biosecurity Plant Officers at Hawke's Bay Regional Council for advice and we will work with you to eradicate it.

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