

# Scotch Broom

*Cytisus scoparius*

Pea Family

**Non-Designated Noxious Weed: Control Generally Not Required\***

## Identification Tips

- Evergreen shrub
- Reaches heights of 6 to 10 feet
- Branches are erect and angled with prominent ridges
- Small yellow flowers along the entire stem
- Small, short-lived leaves can be simple but are generally three-parted

## Biology

- Flowers from March to June
- Reproduces primarily by seed; when mature, the seedpods split and eject seeds up to 20 feet away
- Over 10,000 seeds can be produced per plant
- Seeds can remain viable in the soil for 5 to 60 years

## Impacts

- Displaces native and beneficial plants and prevents reforestation
- Renders rangeland and grasslands worthless
- Seeds toxic to humans, horses and livestock
- Dense stands impede the movement of wildlife
- Considered a potential fire hazard

## Distribution

- Found throughout King County including in pastures, vacant lands, harvested timberlands and along roadsides and rights-of-way
- Thrives in full sun, but will also establish in shady areas

\* Control of Scotch broom is required on State Route 2 and I-90, between mile marker 34 and the King/Kittitas County line; control is not required for the remainder of the county, but it is recommended wherever feasible.



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*Scotch broom (also called Scot's broom) was brought to United States from the British Isles and central Europe as an ornamental and for erosion control.*



*In the Pacific Northwest, Scotch broom spreads rapidly, growing so dense that it is often impenetrable.*

## Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control  
Program Line: 206-296-0290  
[www.kingcounty.gov/weeds](http://www.kingcounty.gov/weeds)

## What You Can Do

There is no legal requirement to control Scotch broom in most of King County, but removal is recommended as part of forestry, pasture and natural area management. You can help prevent Scotch broom from spreading by washing vehicles, boots and animals that may have been in infested areas and removing it from your property whenever possible.

## Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons.

**Manual:** For small sites with few plants, pull or dig up plants and remove as much root as possible so the plant will not re-sprout. This method can be highly labor-intensive and to be fully effective, all mature plants need to be removed so no new seeds are produced. Pulling of medium to large plants is much easier with specially designed steel weed wrenches ([www.weedwrenches.com](http://www.weedwrenches.com)). Wrenches are available to borrow from the King County Noxious Weed Control Program (call for more info). Controlled burning can also be effective for removing dense broom infestations. Check local regulations for special permits, burn bans or other restrictions.



*Specially designed weed wrenches work well for Scotch broom removal.*

**Mechanical:** Cutting down mature shrubs is fairly effective but mowing young, green plants is not and will result in a dense carpet of short broom plants. For mature plants, clear thick stands or multibranching plants with manually operated tools: chainsaws, brush cutters, axes, machetes or loppers. Cut plants near ground level where the stem is more yellow than green; much more effective when done in the dry season (August-September) but take care to avoid spreading mature seed pods to un-infested areas. Cut large, mature plants at chest height or below and cut off side branches during the dry season. Key to success is to keep seeds from forming after initial clearing.

**Chemical:** **Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. Herbicides should only be applied at the rates specified on the label.** Foliar herbicide application

### Spanish Broom: Removal Required

Due to its limited distribution in King County, Spanish broom is a Class A noxious weed. While it looks similar to the more common Scotch broom, this plant can be identified by its smooth, round, primarily leafless stems and fragrant flowers. Spanish broom is also non-native and highly invasive in the same types of habitat as Scotch broom. It is found in both urban and rural areas where it has escaped ornamental plantings.



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*Eradication is required for Spanish broom.*

is most effective after full leaf development and before fall senescence. Basal or cut stump treatment methods are also effective. Products containing glyphosate are most effective if applied to actively growing plants. Glyphosate is absorbed by the growing leaves (not woody stems). However, glyphosate is “non-selective” and will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with, so make sure not to drip on desirable plants. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredient of triclopyr, 2,4-D and metsulfuron work well for lawn or pasture areas as they won't harm grasses. After applying herbicides, do not cut down the

treated brooms until they have died completely. This can take two weeks or more. Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. For questions about herbicide use, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.