

# noxious weeds

threatening the health of the local environment

## WEEDY PLANTS



Scotch broom  
Flax-leaf broom  
Cape broom  
Spanish broom  
Gorse  
St John's wort



St John's wort

St John's wort, a native of the Mediterranean region, is a very common weed of the tablelands and less often seen on the coast.

### St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is a perennial herb to about 50cm high with heads of bright yellow flowers, that appear in spring to early summer. The margins of the petals are often rimmed with small black glands.

The flowering stems die over winter and plants either disappear altogether (although the roots remain) or are present only as low, sprawling stems with opposite pairs of pale blue-green leaves. In dense infestations these may form a thick mat over the ground.

If held up to the light the leaves appear to be perforated by many tiny translucent dots, hence the scientific name. These oil glands produce hypericin, a toxic substance.

Seed germinates in the autumn, winter or spring after it is produced, but plants generally do not flower in the first year, making them very hard to spot.

Seed sticks to livestock or vehicles and is also spread in contaminated soil or in hay, grain or pasture seed. Plants can also grow from sections of root broken up by cultivation.

St John's wort is a weed of pasture and native grassy woodland or grassland in which it is very invasive and hard to get rid of.

It is toxic to livestock, causing photosensitisation, particularly in light-coloured and white-faced animals. The faces and mouths become itchy and raw, preventing feeding and causing extreme irritation. Stock can consume small amounts without harm, and goats can assist with control. However, stock can become sensitised to it, suffering increased severity with increased consumption.

It is also toxic to humans, despite being used in herbal medicine as an anti-depressant. Toxins can be absorbed by handling and symptoms include lethargy, loss of appetite, dizziness and nausea. Wear gloves when handling this plant, or avoid handling it altogether.

Prevent infestations by feeding pellets rather than hay or grain, and check areas where hand feeding has occurred for seedlings. Hand pulling is ineffective because removal of the whole root system is necessary, but almost impossible. Spot-spraying is a more effective method and safer, given that handling can be risky.

If using herbicides be sure to read the label and heed the label.

Consult your local Council weeds staff or herbicide supplier for more detailed information about control methods.

It is listed as noxious in all south coast Local Government Areas, in category 3 (the plant must be fully and continuously suppressed and destroyed).



1/2 Miles

Black glands on petals



1/2 Miles

Oil glands on leaf



St John's wort infesting grassy woodland

### small native (*Hypericum gramineum*)



1/2 Miles

Small native St John's wort

There is a native St John's wort, *Hypericum gramineum*, which is very much smaller than the weed. It seldom grows taller than about 15cm and its flowers are half the size (1cm across). Its leaves have the same transparent oil dots, and often have a slight purple tinge. It grows in grassy woodlands and forest.

native look-alike

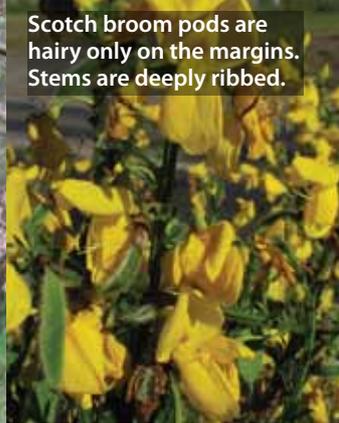
# weedy plants: a threat to agriculture and the environment

for more information please contact:

Illawarra District Noxious Weeds Authority	(02) 4233 1129
Shoalhaven City Council	(02) 4429 3111
Eurobodalla Shire Council	(02) 4474 1000
Bega Valley Shire Council	(02) 6499 2222



Scotch broom infestation on the upper Shoalhaven River



Scotch broom pods are hairy only on the margins. Stems are deeply ribbed.



Cape broom seed pods are hairy all over. Leaflets are short and broad.



Flax-leaf broom has long narrow leaflets.



Spanish broom has smooth, leafless stems.



Gorse has spiny stem tips and plump hairy seed pods.

## Brooms and Gorse

There are a number of similar weeds in the pea family which are yellow-flowered shrubs. Scotch or English broom, gorse, cape broom and Spanish broom are all listed as noxious in at least one of the south coast local government areas. All but Spanish broom have been recognised as Weeds of National Significance.

The brooms arrived here as garden plants and the very prickly gorse as a hedging plant. Scotch broom and gorse prefer the tablelands climate but there are small coastal infestations. Cape, flax-leaf and Spanish broom are more often seen on the coast, usually in and around towns.

**Brooms and gorse reduce carrying capacity of pasture**, and provide cover for feral animals such as rabbits, foxes and pigs. **Scotch broom is poisonous**, particularly the seeds. They invade forest, replacing native understorey plants and changing the soil fertility by fixing nitrogen. Dense stands are highly flammable and burn very hot, worsening the effects of fires in bushland.

Control is by chipping or spot-spraying of isolated plants before they produce seed, or cultivate or boom-spray large infestations and

establish a dense sward of grasses and clovers to out-compete weeds. Fire could be used to stimulate germination of soil-stored seed so that it can be sprayed.

In appearance brooms are all shrubs 1-3m high with ribbed or smooth stems, pure yellow flowers and hard-coated seed in pods. Spanish broom is leafless, Scotch broom may be leafless or have small leaves with one or three leaflets, while cape and flax-leaf broom always have leaves with three leaflets.

Gorse has leaves with three leaflets as seedlings but these are lost on mature plants. Stems are ribbed, hairy and armed with spines up to 5cm long.

noxious weed

## Native peas

There are still some types of ornamental brooms sold (*Cytisus* and *Genista* species and cultivars) but these are best avoided as they are also likely to be weedy.

On the south coast there are many native peas and some other shrubs which have some of the features of brooms or gorse, such as leaflessness, spiny branches, three-leafleted leaves or yellow flowers. Two leafless species are *Jacksonia scoparia* which grows in grassy forest and has weeping grey branchlets, and native broom (*Viminaria juncea*) which grows in wet areas. Most native peas do not have the pure yellow flowers of the brooms, but the wedge peas (*Gompholobium* species) do, and also have leaves with three leaflets. Get suspected broom plants properly identified before removing them. Your local Council weeds officers can help with this.



Jacksonia



Native broom

native look-alike