

## Oh, Those Beautiful, Treacherous Brooms

Spring has sprung and with it will soon come the beautiful yellow blossoms of all the broom plants, blooming on hillsides and roadsides in the foothills and up into the high country. Unfortunately, even though eye catching, broom plants create problems. Here is information from the University of California Integrated Pest Management program (updated by Scott Oneto, Farm Advisor for Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado and Tuolumne Counties in June, 2020) about various broom plants. You can read the complete hand-out at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74147.html>

Brooms are a group of shrubs that were introduced into North America from Europe and North Africa in the mid-1800s. Brooms can be found growing along roadsides, forestlands, coastlines, riparian areas, brushlands, and disturbed areas. Initially introduced as ornamentals, they were later promoted by federal and state agencies for erosion control along roadsides and in mined areas. As a result, five broom species have become naturalized in California and are classified as invasive weeds by many federal, state, and local jurisdictions.

These highly competitive shrubs grow rapidly and form dense stands that both people and wildlife find impenetrable. Their dense stems make regeneration of most other plant species difficult or impossible. They create a dangerous fire hazard. In addition, brooms can fix atmospheric nitrogen, increasing soil fertility and giving a competitive advantage to other non-native weeds that, unlike local natives, thrive on high nitrogen levels. The four most common broom species in California are Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*), and Portuguese broom (*Cytisus striatus*). For photos of the different broom plants, go to <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74147.html>

Although many retailers have stopped selling the species mentioned above, some nurseries still sell these and other brooms, including many hybrids. Residents should avoid planting them as many of these have similar invasive characteristics. Some of the available species include sweet broom (*Cytisus x spachianus* and *Genista racemosa*) and multiple Scotch broom hybrids including Burkwood's broom (*Cytisus x burkwoodii*), Lilac Time, Moonlight, and Lena, to name a few.

The safest approach is to avoid planting any broom species. Several alternate plant species have similar attributes but are not invasive. Contact your county Master Gardeners (find your local organization at <http://mg.ucanr.edu/FindUs/> ) or visit PlantRight.org for a list of recommendations.

All four broom species produce dark colored pods in mid-to-late summer that contain shiny greenish-brown seeds. The pods ripen during the dry summer months, then explosively eject their seeds several feet away, making a popping noise audible for some distance. All brooms are prolific seed producers, with a single shrub producing as many as 2,000 to 3,500 pods containing up to 20,000 seeds.

So, what to do? Small infestations can be removed by hand-pulling or mechanical grubbing. A variety of tools can aid in removal, including shovels or picks, chains, or specialized tools such as the Brush Grubber or The Uprooter. It is easiest to remove plants in early spring or late fall when the soil is moist and roots can be dislodged. Grubbing when the soil is dry and hard usually will break off the stems, leaving rootstalks that may resprout. Fortunately, with brooms, fragments of stems do not survive to produce new roots as in some weedy species. <https://ucanr.edu/sb3/admin/pageasset.cfm?assetnum=40470&pagenum=30861>

Mowing and burning do not provide effective control of established broom plants. However, grazing can provide control in small areas, if the grazing pressure is high enough to continually suppress growth. Goats and sheep have been shown to feed on resprouting shrubs, including brooms. In horses, however, ingestion of Scotch broom is reported to cause neurologic effects such as excitement and loss of muscle control and balance, as well as digestive and reproductive effects.

For chemical control suggestions, please consult Brooms, Pest Note #74147 at the UC IPM website, <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/> So, this year, rather than admiring the luxuriant beauty of broom's flowers, let's each remove at least one broom plant!

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*UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook.*