Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet
Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)

The following short article is from the *Oregon Coast 101 Species* collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Gorse (Ulex europaeus)

tourism.oregonstate.edu/gorse-ulex-europaeus/

By colliek2 August 28, 2020

Gorse Photo by K. Collier

Is it possible to say something good about Gorse?

Maybe. Depends on if you have ever tried to get rid of it or not.

Some consider Gorse as a pretty, fragrant shrub. Others class it as something akin to devil spawn.

Gorse maintains a love-hate reputation not only with humans but other plants. In both cases, it has earned this reputation well.

Is anything good?

Gorse was commonly used in several ways including as a:
–Food source (the flowers are edible). Plant can be used as livestock feed as it is high in protein. Pollen from the various varies help pollinators, such as bees.
–Product creation such as soap making, yellow dye, cleaning tools
–Traditional Medicines (listed as one of 38 plants in the Bach's Flower Remedies.

Lots o' Bad

Gorse has earned a dubious reputation in several ways and is now on several invasive and noxious lists for States and countries. Bandon is no stranger to this plant that arrived over 100 years ago thanks to 'Lord' George Bennett, an Irish immigrant. In Ireland, the plant

had many uses and natural biological controls generally not present here.

Bandon is 'ground zero' for gorse removal and fire risk reduction. The rumor is that gorse helped fuel the Bandon Fire of 1936 that burned down most of the town. A Gorse Action Group in Bandon is working on the problem (see ***What's the Deal with Gorse?*** (https://sea-edu.org/2019/12/17/whats-the-deal-with-gorse/). Then again, dried gorse was used as kindling and a fire fuel for bread making ovens.

More Hate than Love

There is a lot more hate than love now-a-days, and fortunately controls that can help manage this noxious weed. Here is a quick comparison:

Impact	Love	Hate
Soil	Nitrogen, ash rich in potassium, soil amendment	Gorse is known to modify the soil pH in some areas. It may also increase the amount of lead (Pb) in the soil. Seed can stay viable in the soil for decades.
Plants	Tree growth is highly dependent on nitrogen and other micronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium)	Gorse will choke out other plants (shade, pH changes, etc.) reducing diversity. Trees can eventually shade out gorse.
Fire	Pioneer species helps to fix nitrogen	Low-temperature fires will cause seed to germinate.
Hedge	Previously used to contain livestock; not bothered by deer	Seed will colonize a sunny area quickly and reduce grazing opportunities.
Wildlife	Food for pollinators benefit from the long bloom seasons.	Will degrade wildlife by reducing plant diversity
Control	Mechanical (see video), biological (such as Gorse seed weevil Exapion ulicis, Gorse spider mite Tetranychus lintearius, Gorse thrips Sericothrips staphylinus, Gorse soft shoot moth Agonopterix umbellana)	Clearing by hand (spines have been known to pierce heavy leather gloves), chemical (may be difficult in sensitive or over large areas)

A Small Gorse Spider Mite Experiment

Mites control gorse through extensive feeding pressure. The mites will through feeding kill shoots, reduce plant growth and overall plant biomass, and abort the production of flowers. It can take a long time for these mites to control the gorse. What if we could help this along?

This is our little experiment:
Year 1: We took a few, small cuttings from mite-infected plants and threw them on some bushes. Result: Mite spread slow but evident, and did not persist on some bushes.
Year 2: We took larger cuttings off of several bushes that exhibited mite infestation.

Placed several 6-inch sprigs on approximately 12 other bushes with light or relatively no infestation. Result: All bushes infected; most showed some stress.
Year 3: Mechanical removal employed on several large, bushes. Result? Can't wait to plant the area. More mechanical and hand removal is in progress. It will be interesting to look back next year and see the results. I think I also spotted a Gorse soft shoot moth on my shovel handle. ***There is hope***.

OTHER REFERENCES:

–Wikipedia, *Ulex* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulex_europaeus)
–Tasty Natives, *Ulex europaeus* (https://www.greenlab.org/tastynatives/2018/11/01/gorse/
—*6 organic ways to get rid of gorse* (https://thisnzlife.co.nz/5-organic-ways-get-rid-gorse/) (**Note**: link does say 5 rather than 6 as in title, error in link naming)
—*What are the effects of gorse on the ecosystem*? (http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds/a-z-of-weeds/gorse)
–University of Washington, 66-8633 *Gorse Soil Effects* (https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/web/crisprojectpages/0213036-66-8633-gorse-soil-effects.html)
—*Victorian Gorse Taskforce* (https://www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au/biological-control/)