



INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES OF PEI:

Scotch Broom *Cytisus scoparius*



What are invasive species?

Invasive species are species that are introduced to an area outside of their native range. They can be introduced intentionally or unintentionally.

Why are invasive species a problem?

Once they establish, invasive plants can reproduce quickly because they have no natural predators or pathogens to keep them in check, and they often become the dominant species in an ecosystem. This can have devastating effects on the environment. Invasive species can displace native plants by monopolizing space, light, water and other resources needed for growth. They can completely alter native plant communities and drastically lower biodiversity. Invasive species can also adversely affect the economy and human health, and interfere with recreational activities.

HISTORY

Scotch broom originates from Europe. It was brought to North America as an ornamental garden plant in the 1800s. It also had other uses, including: a coffee alternative, medicinal uses, and a source of yellow dye. Since then it has managed to escape from many gardens and is a common invader on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. In PEI there have been a few sightings of scotch broom along roadsides and in ditches. However, most are contained in gardens.

IDENTIFICATION

Here are some distinguishing features that may help to positively identify scotch broom:

- Medium sized shrub, 1-3m tall
- Bright, yellow, pea-like flowers
- Blooms May-June
- Leaves near base have 3 leaflets
- All other leaves are simple



- Stem is bright green, woody, and angled with grooves
- Seed pods look like hairy, flat, pea pods
- Seed pods turn from green to dark brown/black
- Evergreen

CONCERN

Scotch broom is an aggressive invader. It can form dense stands, typically in recently disturbed areas, and displace native tree saplings by shading them out. Once it establishes, scotch broom is very difficult to eradicate. Each plant makes thousands of seeds per year. The seeds can survive in soil for at least 30 years and sprout when the soil is disturbed. Scotch broom is also extremely flammable, whether it is alive or dead.

HABITAT

Scotch broom requires full sun and does not grow well in shade. It is a member of the pea family and, like other plants in this group, it has nitrogen-fixing bacteria in its root which allow it to grow well in poor soil conditions. It can also tolerate drought conditions. It often inhabits disturbed areas, open fields, ditches, and gardens.





CONTROL

Scotch broom can be difficult to eradicate because, even if you have removed the entire tree and as much root as possible, seeds remain viable in the ground for many years. However, the best method of control is still physical removal. Removal should be undertaken before the plant goes to seed. Plants can be cut with gardening shears and the roots dug up. It is important to monitor the site in the years following to remove any new growth that may arise. It is also important to plant native species where removal occurred so that they have a chance to establish and shade out any scotch broom seedlings.

GARDEN ALTERNATIVES

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier spp.*) is a shrub-like tree which is native to PEI. Like scotch broom, serviceberry blooms in May, before most other garden plants. Its flowers are white and form in loose clusters at the end of stems. The flowers yield dark purple berries which are edible to humans and have a very sweet taste. Serviceberry will grow anywhere except extremely wet areas and deep shade.



Common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) is native to PEI. It grows to be 1.5-3m tall. It has beautiful foliage made up of compound leaves with 5-15 leaflets. In July it produces bundles of small white flowers which yield dark purple berries in August-September. The berries are edible to humans, but only if they are cooked. Common elderberry grows best in moist soils. It prefers full sun but will tolerate some shade.

Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is native to PEI. It can grow to be 6m tall. It has simple leaves with a wavy, toothed edge. Witch hazel grows best in part shade and tolerates a wide variety of soil conditions. Like scotch broom, witch hazel produces brilliant yellow flowers. However, witch hazel's flowers bloom in September-October.



How can you help?

Here are a few things you can do to help stop the introduction and spread of alien invasive species:

- Learn more about invasive species in PEI, including how to identify species of concern
- Choose native species whenever possible
- Carefully inspect and clean clothing, gear, animals, and vehicles before visiting a new natural area
- Never dump garden or pond waste in a natural area
- When disposing of invasive species, they should be placed in a clear or dark plastic bag and taken to Island Waste Management for incineration
- Report a sighting

How to report:

If you think you have seen this invasive species on Prince Edward Island, please report your sighting to us by phone or e-mail

Phone: (902) 892-7513

Email: peiinvasives@gmail.com

www.peiinvasives.com



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