Tackling gorse takes effort, but doing nothing means it just gets worse

Growth of Gorse

The first twelve months

The growth of Gorse *(Ulex europaeus)* **in its first twelve months is marked by rapid and resilient development. From germination to maturation, gorse quickly adapts to its environment, establishing itself as a formidable and enduring shrub.**

Understanding the growth pattern of gorse not only provides insight into the plant's ecological role and its ability to thrive in diverse habitats, but also information regarding treatments to contain or eradicate the weed from the environment.

Gorse growth calendar

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Germination	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	
Flowering	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■
Seeding	■	■	■	■								■
Treatment	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Treatments

- **Cultivation by hand** – Dig out the seeding or small plant.
- **Domestic herbicide** – Apply common woody-weed domestic herbicide.
- **Cut and paste** – Mechanically, or by hand depending on plant size, cut down the plants and immediately apply herbicide to the cut stumps.
- **Mechanical knock-down** – Use heavy machinery such as the eco blade, slasher, mulcher, and groomer to knock down the plants. These methods are effective but require follow-up treatments within the next 12 months.
- **Mechanical cultivation and sowing** – Combine cultivation with sowing a robust cover crop of perennial rye grass and legumes to outcompete new gorse seedlings or regrowth. This approach also increases pasture availability for grazing.
- **Commercial herbicide** – Follow up the mechanical treatments with selective herbicide spraying within 12 months to prevent regrowth. Ensure the user applying the herbicide is accredited.

Be aware that soil disturbance can help germinate new seeds, so proper follow-up treatments is crucial.

First Month:

Germination

The journey of gorse begins with the germination of its seeds. In the initial month, the seeds, which have a hard outer coating, undergo a period of dormancy before germination. This dormancy is often broken by environmental factors such as fluctuating temperatures
or physical abrasion.

Once the seed coat is breached, the embryonic plant starts to grow. The root system begins to develop, anchoring the seedling into the soil and absorbing essential nutrients and water.

- **Domestic herbicide**
- **Mechanical cultivation**

The choice between these methods depends on specific circumstances such as area size, labour availability, and budget constraints.

Months 2-3:

Seedling Development

During the second and third months, gorse seedlings emerge above the soil surface.

The first set of leaves, known as cotyledons, are visible and carry out the crucial task of photosynthesis, providing the young plant with energy. The primary root continues to extend downward, while lateral roots begin to form, enhancing the plant's stability and nutrient uptake.

- **Cultivation by hand**
- **Domestic herbicide**
- **Cut and paste**

Months 4-6:

Rapid Growth

From the fourth to the sixth month, gorse experiences a surge in growth. The plant develops its characteristic spiny leaves, which serve as a defence mechanism against herbivores. The stem elongates, and secondary branches start to sprout, giving the plant a bushier appearance.

During this phase, gorse benefits from ample sunlight and well-drained soil, which are conducive to its vigorous growth.

- **Cultivation by hand**
- **Domestic herbicide**
- **Cut and paste**
- **Mechanical knock-down**

Months 7-9:

Establishment

By the seventh month, gorse is well-established in its environment.

The root system is extensive and efficient in nutrient absorption. The foliage thickens, and the plant may start to display its first flowers, although full blooming typically occurs after the first year. The spines become more prominent, reinforcing the plant's protective features.

- **Mechanical knock-down**
- **Commercial herbicide**

Controlling larger plants requires more effort, labour, and costs.

Months 10-12:

Maturation

In the final months of the first year, gorse continues to mature. The shrub reaches its full height potential for the year, often between 1 to 1.5 meters. The leaves and stems become tougher and more resilient to environmental stress. Flower buds develop, preparing the plant for its
first major flowering season in the subsequent year.

This period is crucial for the plant's long-term survival and reproductive success.

- **Mechanical knock-down**
- **Commercial herbicide**
- **Mechanical cultivation**

Under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994,* **all landowners and managers are legally required to prevent the growth and spread of gorse on their property where it is classified as a Regionally controlled weed.** Use the QR code below to download the Gorse Best Practice Guide.

Further Information

Download the VGT Gorse Best Practice Guide for treatment methods.

Visit the VGT website and read the notes and guides.

vicgorsetaskforce.com.au