Ulex europaeus

COMMON NAMES
gorse

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

FLOWER COLOURS
Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shrub up to 2m high; main stems erect or spreading, densely branched in younger parts but eventually bare at base; young twigs and spines somewhat glaucous; hairs usu. grey. Leaves of seedlings not spinous but with 3 hairy leaflets; spines branched; terminal and lateral spines rigid, deeply furrowed, 15~30mm long; secondary spines subtending lateral up to 12mm long. Flowers solitary; bracteoles acute to rounded, 1.5~3mm wide. Calyx greenish-yellow, about 2/3~3/4 length of corolla, with generally patent hairs; calyx teeth connivent. Corolla clear yellow or golden yellow, 13~20mm long; wings > keel. Pod villous, turning dark brown to black, 13~25mm long; seeds smooth and rounded, brown or greenish-brown, shiny, few per pod. (Webb et. al., 1988).

SIMILAR TAXA
A densely branched shrub with sharp spines, eventually bare at the base. The plant is up to 4 metres high and the leaves are very prickly. The stems and branchlets are green to brown in colour. The flowers are yellow and pea-like. The seeds occur in furry pods, are 13-25mm long and contain smooth, rounded, brown or greenish brown seeds. The pod explodes loudly on warm days. The pods are green that turn dark brown to black.

HABITAT
Terrestrial. A plant of coastal and lowland habitats. The plant occurs in sites with low - low/modertate fertility. It is common in disturbed areas and can tolerate a wide range of conditions and soil types allowing it to establish in most areas. It is more abundant in waste places, riverbeds and poorer land than it is in developed and fertile land. It occurs in scrub and forest margin, shrubland, fernland and riverbed communities and grassland, shrubland, forest margins, coastal habitats and waste places. It occurs in rough foothills and less-intensively farmed areas and is often abundant in disturbed lowland and lower montane places. It is a plant that often aggressively invades rough pasture.

GENUS
Ulex

FAMILY
Fabaceae

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AUTHORITY
Ulex europaeus L.

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
(January) May, June, July, August, September, October, November (December)

YEAR NATURALISED
1867

ORIGIN
Western Europe

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental

TOLERANCES
The plant is tolerant to frost and drought; intolerant to shade and slightly tolerant of poor drainage.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Perennial. The flowers are monoecious. Seeds germinate in spring or autumn or spring to mid-summer. Also reproduces vegetatively. Seed is produced at a rate of 500 - 1 000/m sq/annum and under the right conditions can remain viable for up to 100 years but significant amounts do not last beyond 30 years. Seeds germinate best at temperatures of 15 to 19 degrees celcius (Parsons and Cuthbertson, 2001). Seed is dispersed by an explosive mechanism and gravity. Seed pods disperse seed up to 6 metres from the parent plant. Machinery assists seed dispersal. Some seed is carried by water and shingle and by gravel, soil and birds. It resprouts from sub-epidermal and axillary buds after grazing. It resprouts from a well-developed lignotuber and seed dormancy is broken by fire. Burning gorse provides an ideal seed bed.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)
This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

NVS CODE
ULEEUR

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ulex-europaeus/

PDF DATE
25 May 2026