

## NO ROOM FOR BROOM

Broom is best removed before the wildflowers bloom (February), after they have bloomed (May) and mid-July, before the broom disperses its seeds. Studies have found the most efficient way to remove broom without disturbing the surrounding soil. To minimize subsequent regeneration and sprouting:

- cut below the surface to the first sideways root on larger plants between the end of May and the beginning of July.
- For smaller plants in flower, pull if the stem diameter is smaller than a pencil. Otherwise clip midway up the stem and uproot in winter when soils are moist. Plants of this diameter are most likely to re-sprout from the cut stem.
- Remove all your brush clippings.
- Plant a native shrub like flowering redcurrant or ocean spray in its place.

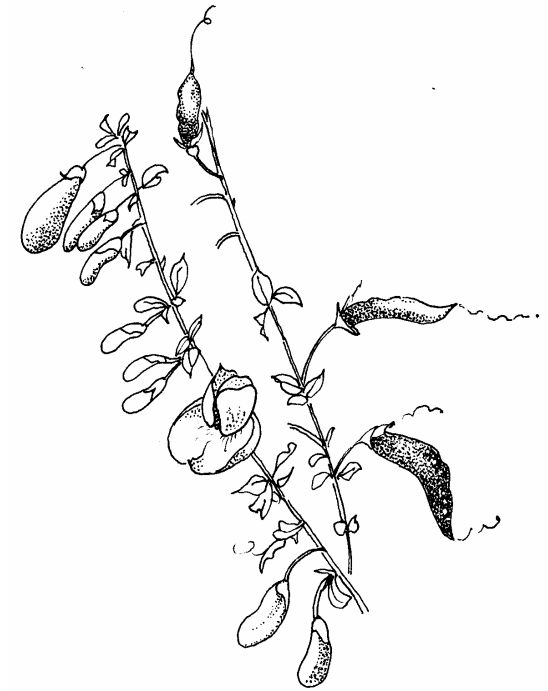


Almost pure stands of Scots broom, *Cytisus scoparius*, can be found from B.C. to northern California, where, another broom species—French broom, *Genista monspessulana*, takes over and spreads to Baja California, Mexico.



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## BROOM

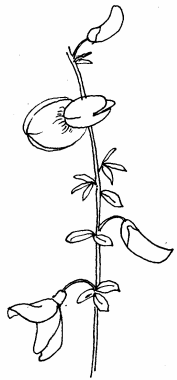


Capt. Walter Colquhoun Grant, of the Royal Scots Greys, arrived in Victoria, B.C. in 1849, where he built a fortified home complete with experimental crops. From the Sandwich Islands he obtained some seeds of broom. Three grew. Bees discovered them, and in less than 150 years, the descendants of just three seedlings have taken over vast stretches of western North America, dominating drier coastal habitat and disturbed ground to the exclusion and endangerment of native species.

# SCOTCH BROOM

## *Cytisus scoparius*

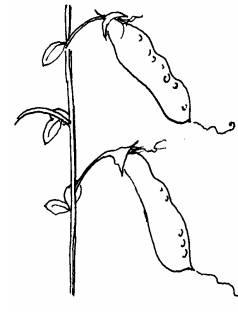
Scotch Broom is a perennial evergreen shrub in the legume (Fabaceae) family. It reaches heights up to 3 metres and has angular, dark green branches. Many branches are leafless or have few leaves. Upper leaves are simple and pressed close to the stem, but lower leaves are trifoliolate (three parted). The upright twigs were cut and tied into bunches by the Anglo-Saxons for use as a brush (or scopa), hence the specific name scoparius.



From spring through early summer broom bushes are covered in bright yellow pea-like flowers, or yellow with red pigment in some petals,

and by Fall, these set seed in black pods, 3-5 cm. long, which snap open when dry, flicking their seeds far and wide.

A mature shrub, just four years old, can produce as many as 1,200 seed pods. When the plant's pods explode, 10,000 seeds scatter! These can lie dormant in the soil for decades.



### Biological impact

Broom's biological impact affects both the entire ecosystem and species diversity. Like peas and beans, broom is a legume which alters the soil structure by adding more nitrogen. Studies suggest that this new chemical balance has two negative impacts: it prevents wildflower re-colonization, and encourages the growth of other introduced species like long grasses and blackberries that crowd out original vegetation, such as Nootka Rose and Spirea. As well, because broom generates shade, this aggressive plant often displaces the indigenous wildflowers like the delicate Miner's Lettuce, and wild lilies.

### History

"Brom" is an Anglo-Saxon word for "foliage". Shrubs were used as "besoms" or bunches of twigs used as brooms. The blossoms were unwelcome in many British homes during May, lest they invite death into the household. Using a brush made of broom is equally undesirable in that month, as the old saying:

*"If you sweep the house with broom in May, You'll sweep the head of the house away."*

Although broom contains toxic alkaloids that depress the heart and nervous system, it was used by herbalists in medieval times to cure rabies, lymph-dropsy, worm infestations, jaundice and to expel poisons from the bites of venomous snakes. Henry VIII was known to drink the distilled water of broom flowers as a tonic. Perhaps he shared the common belief that broom had magic powers as an aphrodisiac, an aid to sleep and could ward off witches.