February Weed of the month: Scotch broom

It’s that time of year again, get out your tissues and get ready to see the streets lined with yellow. This bright yellow plant is easily the most noted noxious weed. Often hailed as one of the most prominent plants in Western Washington, scotch broom can be seen as a beauty and a nuisance. If you need help in identifying this plant, just look out your window as you drive down many of our highways and byways, and look for that bright yellow plant. Do not be fooled by its sneaky ways to disguise its self by having some red and white flowered plants, they are all scotch broom and all invasive. Keep in mind that this plant is not all bad, in fact, often it is playing a role in stabilizing the soil and the plant is a nitrogen fixer. For many of us though, this plant is just a nuisance that sends our allergies out of control. For many natural areas, this plant poses a serious threat to native plants and natural diversity in an area.

Scotch broom is a hardy plant that can cause many problems for you on your property. These plants have oil in them that is highly flammable and can create a hazard near your home. The roots can create a problem near your foundation and you would never want Scotch broom to become established on your drain fields or near your well.

So what can you do? Scotch broom might never fully go away in our area but you can help slow its spread. If you have a large area that is about three years old, you can be very successful at controlling the area by bringing in a brush hog to knock down the mature plants. Keep in mind that those plants have been there for many years dropping seeds and it will take some work to get rid of the seed bank. The best thing to do, but not always possible, is to do some light tilling on the site and reseed the area with grasses. Putting the grasses on the controlled area will allow for the landowner to maintain the site through mowing. If you only have a few plants, one thing to do is to use some clippers to cut the plant as close to the soil surface and dispose of above ground material. You may also contact our office to borrow a weed wrench. This devise pulls the roots out of the ground with relative ease. It is recommended that you use the weed wrench after a rain event so that the soil is loose and the roots will pull out of the ground easier.

Keep in mind that every site is different and that control recommendations for your site can be obtained through contacting our office. The key for controlling scotch broom is weed often and weed as many plants as you can. The Noxious Weed Control Board’s motto is “one a day keeps a million away”. Happy weeding.