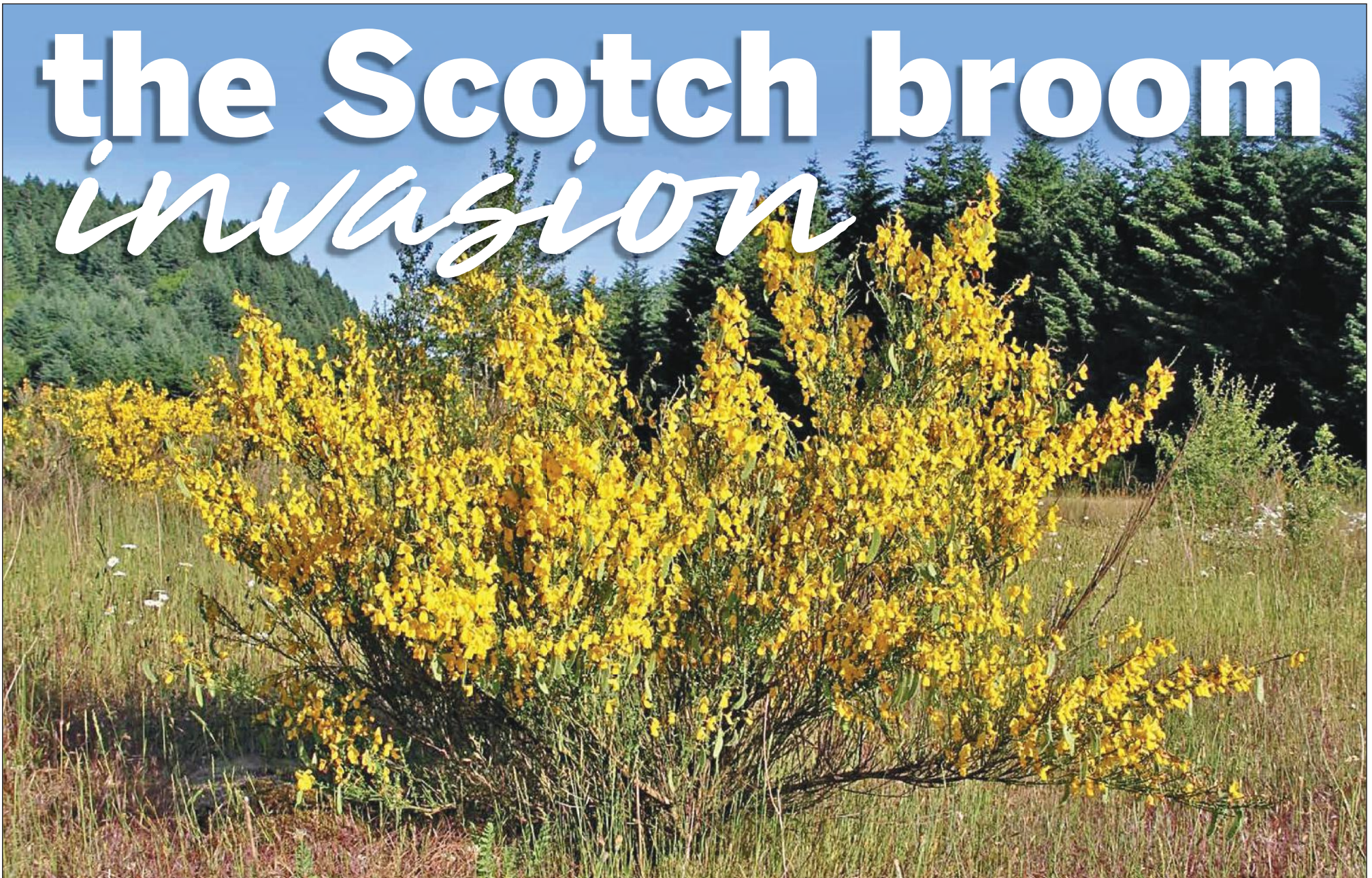


the Scotch broom invasion



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Scotch broom is native to Africa, and parts of Europe and Spain. If neglected, it is even considered invasive in its native countries.

MARGO ROTEN
Master Gardener

Question: I have a beautiful hillside of Scotch broom that I enjoy looking at, however, my neighbor insists that it is harmful and invasive. What is the definition of invasive and why does that matter?

Answer: Invasive species are defined by Oregon statute as “non-native organisms that cause economic or environmental harm and are capable of spreading to new areas of the state.” ORS 570.750

In addition to Oregon, Washington, California, coastal British Columbia and West Virginia also classify Scotch broom as invasive.

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A plant is considered invasive when it displaces the natural vegetation and interferes with the ecosystems of the area. As it spreads, it replaces grasses and young trees where wildlife and farm animals



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forage. Also, the seeds are toxic to wildlife, cattle and horses. As the plant becomes more entrenched in our state, the level of damage to wildlife, domesticated animals and the economy increases.

How do plants from halfway across the globe even get here? In the case of Scotch broom, it was introduced to California in the 1800s and used as an ornamental in many gardens. In Oregon, Scotch broom was planted on the coast to stabilize the dunes and also used along highways as an ornamental plant.

There are three key characteristics to Scotch broom that allow it to become invasive. First, when the seed pods open, they do so with an exploding action. This carries the seeds far away from where

they were intended to grow. Second, the seeds have a very hard coating that protects the seed. Third, the seeds are rich in lipids and proteins, attracting ants. The ants bring these delicious seeds back to their nests. Also, other animals digesting the seeds contribute to their further disbursement.

How can we prevent introducing invasive plants? The best way of prevention is to only purchase and plant species that are native to the area. For example, Scotch broom has several plants that look quite similar to it. They include tall Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*), golden currant (*Ribes aureum*), mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*), and blue blossom (*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*).

Your neighbor is correct about the harm invasive plants cause. By eradicating the Scotch broom and replacing it with native plant look-alikes you will still be able to enjoy your lovely hillside but know that you are causing no

harm to the environment. In fact, by encouraging native species, you are helping it.

How do we control and/or eradicate Scotch broom? There are three methods for removal. They are chemical, mechanical and biological means or, depending on your needs, you may select a combination.

Chemical means that are effective include Triclopyr and Glyphosate. If you select a chemical method, you must follow the directions on the label to the letter for your safety and the safety of the environment. This includes protective clothing. Also, do not cut or mow within two weeks of spraying.

Mechanical methods include mowing and weeding by hand. For smaller areas, pulling out each plant by the roots (making sure to get the complete root) is effective. Monitor for regrowth and plant heavily over the area where the Scotch broom was removed. Planting over them will shade and block out any new growth.

If the area is larger, mowing

is an option but be aware that Scotch broom goes to seed in mid-April so you must be careful of not breaking the seed pods and unintentionally spreading the seed. Some prefer waiting until late summer to mow or cut, after seeding and during a time when the Scotch broom is stressed. Cut the plant as close to the ground as possible and monitor for new growth. Continue cutting or weeding out when new growth appears.

A biologic solution is the release of natural pests of the plant that are approved for this use in your area. These include: broom seed beetle, Scotch broom seed weevil and broom twig miner.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.