

KC Weed News – August 2010

King County, Washington

(<http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/animalsAndPlants/noxious-weeds/weed-news.aspx>)

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Weed of the Month: [Spanish Broom](#) (*Spartium junceum*), [Class A Noxious Weed](#) in King County, Washington

During a recent conversation with a restoration volunteer from California, I was reminded of the invasive brooms other than [Scotch broom](#), which are not as common up here but definitely have the potential to spread. This volunteer was particularly concerned about people being able to buy and plant invasive broom species such as sweet broom that are spreading so badly in California. In California, a plant can't be regulated as a noxious weed if doing so would harm agricultural production of that plant, so she was hoping to find out that this wasn't the case in other states.

Fortunately for us, our quarantine list does include two invasive broom species, the very widespread Scotch broom and the much less widespread Spanish broom. By preventing the further introduction of these broom species, our quarantine law is allowing us to contain and even work towards eradication of these invaders, where they are still limited in distribution. You might say that it is a bit late for Scotch broom considering how much we have already, but it is definitely not too late for our featured weed of the month, Spanish broom.

I will confess that when Spanish broom was first added to the state noxious weed list, I wondered if it really was a problem in our state, since at first we mostly found it where it had been intentionally planted. It is always difficult to decide when a plant crosses the invasive species line and should be stopped. Ideally, you want to stop an invader before it is widespread, because prevention is the cheapest and most effective weed control method. However, before a plant spreads badly, it's hard to know if it will really cause enough problems to justify getting rid of it. Not all introduced species cause problems after all. However, experience has told us that many invasive species have a long lag time from when they are first

introduced to an area to when they start to really take off and invade, and it is crucial to act quickly if there is enough evidence that a plant is becoming a problem.

In the case of Spanish broom, although it didn't spread that often in ornamental plantings, it did spread in dry, poor soils where it had a definite advantage over other plants. In fact, when we looked more closely, we found several places where it was spreading quite a lot by seed and had every appearance of being able to invade at least as badly as Scotch broom, and possibly more so given how drought-tolerant it was. The infestations were generally on dry slopes or poor, rocky soil. Sometimes the escaped populations were near intentionally planted sites, but other times it wasn't so obvious how the plants got there. It became clear that Spanish broom was quite good at spreading by seed to new locations.

Given this evidence, as well as knowing how badly it was spreading in places such as Oregon and California and elsewhere in the world, and how tough it is to control once it gets into the wild, it made a lot of sense to stop it now while it is still fairly limited. Fortunately for us, WSDA agreed and acted proactively to prohibit further sale of Spanish broom in the state. Now, we just need to work on getting rid of the plants we already have.

Like many invasive broom species, Spanish broom originates from the summer-drought climates of the Mediterranean. What this means for us is that it can handle very rocky, dry soils and is not limited by niceties like soil nutrients or water. The most vulnerable areas are dry bluffs on the Puget Sound, exposed hillsides, roadsides, and rocky pastures and fields. Spanish broom is the most drought-tolerant of all the brooms and is capable of invading even the driest hillsides and fields, where even Scotch broom might have trouble succeeding. Both brooms are also poisonous to livestock and a fire hazard when they are allowed to grow in large infestations. Like Scotch broom, Spanish broom also has long-lived seeds that continue to germinate long after the initial plants have been removed. If there has been Spanish broom in the area in the past, it would be a good idea to keep an eye out for young seedlings around the same areas, much as you would do with Scotch broom.

Although Spanish broom looks from a distance a lot like Scotch broom, close up there are clear differences. Spanish broom flowers are sweet-smelling and clustered near the tops of the plant, the stems are round, like a rush (compared with the ridged or angled stems of other brooms), it is only sparsely leafy, and the leaves are simple, single leaves (not in three's like on Scotch broom). For more information and photos you can visit our [website](#).

When searching on the internet for information on brooms or when shopping for brooms, make sure to have the Latin names. There are many similar species sold under similar names, so it can be very confusing. There aren't any broom species native to Washington and several are invasive, so if you are trying not to introduce a new problem species, it might be best to avoid all brooms unless you are certain it is not one of the invasive species. At this time, only Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*) are banned from sale in Washington, but other broom species are being monitored and may be added in the future if they are found escaping beyond where they are planted.

Because Spanish broom is a Class A noxious weed, control is required and we are definitely interested in finding new locations in order to stop it from spreading. To report a Spanish broom location in King County, use our [online infestation form](#). For more information about this or other noxious weeds, feel free to contact us [by email](#) or phone at 206-296-0290 or visit us on the web at www.kingcounty.gov/weeds.

Weed Tips for August

Not all yellow weeds are created equal. In our busy lives, it is important to prioritize. This is true for weed control as much as anything (maybe more, considering how endless it seems at times). The first weeds to control should probably be those that are new to your property and those that could cause the most harm to your or your neighbor's land. When it comes to yellow flowered weeds this time of year, this mostly means [tansy ragwort](#). So it is important to be able to tell tansy ragwort apart from similar plants flowering this time of year, in order to save time and focus on the one that is most potentially harmful. [Common tansy](#) flowers are also yellow right now, but look closely and you can see they are just "button" flowers – no outer fringe of ray petals around the central disc or button. Tansy ragwort flowers are more like daisies with yellow outer petals and yellow centers. Some folks have confused the low-growing [pineapple weed](#) with tansy ragwort, thinking it was just flowering shorter. Again, pineapple weed flowers are more like buttons than daisies. Other yellow flowers this time of year include [dandelions](#) and their mean cousin [false dandelion or cat's ear](#), but these flowers are all petals or ray flowers, with no central button or disc flowers. [Common St. Johnswort](#) was really prolific this year, but it can be distinguished from tansy ragwort by its small, oval leaves and flowers with five petals (not daisy-like at all). Probably no one would confuse [tall buttercup](#) with tansy ragwort, although it too is yellow, but has five petals (and is shiny enough to reflect yellow on your skin if you hold it close). If you are at all unsure of which yellow-flowered plant is tansy ragwort, just give us a call and we can walk you through the key features, or [email us](#) a photo and we'll get right back to you with an answer.

Pull and bag flowering [tansy ragwort](#) to prevent 20 more years of bad luck. If your plants haven't already gone to seed, pulling and bagging tansy ragwort now will keep it from making seeds that can last as long as 20 years in the soil. However, make sure to keep pulled plants away from livestock – tansy ragwort remains toxic when dry and is more palatable after being pulled. Look for tansy ragwort anywhere it was growing last year – you are sure to get plants again where it was last year. Remember to look for low-growing rosettes as well as tall, flowering plants. Don't mow flowering tansy ragwort because this can just make it worse (cut tansy stems will form seeds just like a dandelion if they are mowed, and mowing tansy when it is in seed will definitely spread it). Spraying tansy ragwort is best done in fall and spring on the young rosettes. Spraying flowering plants now will probably not kill the plants before they go to seed, so you'll be stuck controlling it for another 20 years. If you cut off the flowering tops and throw those in the garbage, then it is alright to use a broadleaf herbicide on the remaining rosettes and non-flowering plants. Just don't use a general weed killer like Roundup that kills grass, because grass is very helpful at suppressing weed seed germination. If you have more tansy ragwort than will fit in your garbage, give us a call at 206-296-0290 and we will mail you a voucher to dispose of it at a county transfer station for free.

Watch for purple and yellow along the shorelines and wetlands. [Garden loosestrife](#) and [purple loosestrife](#) might have pretty flowers, but they do serious damage to native plant and wildlife habitat along the water's edge and in wetlands. Both plants are tough to pull up and garden loosestrife is especially tenacious with its extensive, long rhizomes. At the very least, both plants need to be cut at the base to prevent seeding and thrown in the garbage. Better yet, contact our aquatic weed specialist [Katie Messick](#) for advice. Purple loosestrife can sometimes be managed with special loosestrife-eating insects, especially where infestations are large. Katie can tell you if insects have been released in your area. For garden loosestrife, we have a few projects where we are assisting landowners along the Snoqualmie and Raging Rivers and elsewhere where the garden loosestrife is just starting to get established. For more information, call us at 206-296-0290 or email at noxious.weeds@kingcounty.gov.

Practice good weed hygiene when hiking and camping. We should all add one more hiking essential to our backpacks – a stiff boot brush or whisk broom for cleaning our boots and packs between hikes. After hiking, we should give our boots a good brushing to remove any seeds of invasive plant species in order to avoid spreading them to other wild areas. Seeds of invasive weeds like [garlic mustard](#), [shiny geranium](#), [butterfly bush](#) and [tansy ragwort](#) are easily carried on boots, clothes and equipment, and weeds like [knotweed](#) and [yellow archangel](#) are spread by stem and root fragments. By giving your boots or shoes a good brushing before leaving the area, you can help prevent seeds from spreading to the next trail you hike. Hikers should also clean their clothing, backpacks and equipment before going to a new area to hike and campers should shake out their tents before breaking camp to dislodge invasive seeds. It might seem like a bit of a nuisance to take these precautions, but it's worth the extra effort to protect our forests and wilderness areas.

Report [designated Class A and B noxious weeds](#) on roads and trails. County, city and state crews are all busy working on noxious weeds along roadsides, trails and parks. However, even with their hard work and our own efforts to send them locations of regulated noxious weeds, we can't be everywhere and some sites get missed. If you see a patch of tansy ragwort or any other regulated noxious weed growing on public land or a roadside, please contact our office and we will make sure the right agency or property owner gets notified quickly. We can be reached at 206-296-0290 or you can use our online infestation report form, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/animalsAndPlants/noxious-weeds/infestations-form.aspx>.

August is a great time to control knotweed. The sun is shining, the ground is more or less dry, and the knotweed is prime for the picking. Well, maybe more than picking! This is a very effective time for chemical control of knotweed, including stem-injection, and if digging is possible for you (small site, loose soil, etc), it's also a great time for that method. For more information on knotweed control methods, check out our webpage on [invasive knotweed](#). Some good resources on the page include our detailed [Best Management Practices](#) for knotweed and our [video clips](#) on different methods of control including stem-injection. If you attended one of our knotweed workshops this year or a previous year and would like to borrow a stem-injector, it's not too late to sign one out for this season. Just give Frances Lucero a call at 206-263-6465 or an email at frances.lucero@kingcounty.gov.

Update on Noxious Weed Program's Knotweed Projects

Speaking of knotweed, our program's knotweed control season is well underway and crews from WCC, EarthCorps and Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust have all been out in the field with us to inject plants along King County's project rivers. Grant funding pays for these crews and our staff to control knotweed on the South Fork Snoqualmie River, Middle Fork Snoqualmie River, Cedar River, Green River, Soos Creek and the Skykomish River. In addition, the Greenway Trust is managing a knotweed project on the Raging River – see update on that project below.

While some of these systems are heavily infested and make for slow progress for the stem injection crews (like along the Cedar River where work is taking place around Taylor Creek near Maxwell Rd), others, like Soos Creek, have only small amounts of knotweed remaining and so crews have been able to cover a large area quickly. On the South Fork Snoqualmie, crews have been focused on the area around Camp Waskowitz near North Bend. Work on the Skykomish hasn't started yet, but will be taking place later this month, mainly downstream from Beckler River. In addition to these injection crews, our staff and contractors revisit all previously

treated sites on these rivers to spray any re-growth that's coming up this season. This includes Issaquah Creek where we have only limited funding and can't take on new areas, but hope to re-treat sites that were controlled last year to keep those areas from becoming re-infested.

Lots of landowners have been doing their part too. Anyone who attended one of our knotweed workshops can check out a knotweed injector from our office and inject their own plants. Since our regular projects just focus on the river corridor, this allows people to treat knotweed that we wouldn't be able to get to otherwise. About a dozen landowners and agencies have already borrowed injectors this summer, and even more have scheduled to check one out over the next month. Anyone who is still interested in borrowing this equipment or who has questions about our knotweed program can contact Frances Lucero at 206-263-6465 or frances.lucero@kingcounty.gov.

Greenway Begins Raging River Knotweed Control Project

The Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust has begun a multi-year campaign to control invasive knotweed along the Raging River. After mapping out the extent of the knotweed last year and obtaining enough funding to get started this year, the Greenway crews are working hard to control knotweed along the river, starting at the uppermost infestations and systematically working their way down the river. Because knotweed flows downstream, public support and participation is critical to the success of this project. Knotweed is truly a community problem that doesn't stop at any property line. The Greenway Trust is asking that landowners along the Raging River join them in their campaign to eradicate knotweed. Free technical information and assistance is available to any landowner along the Raging with knotweed. For more information contact **Jennifer McKeown** at 206.373.1601 or Jennifer.mckeown@mtsgreenway.org.

Fall City Volunteer Helps Neighbors Get a Jump on Knotweed

Sandy Prescott, a volunteer with Stewardship in Action in Fall City, is becoming the Fall City knotweed queen. Impressed with how the local group Partnership for a Rural King County (PRKC), supported landowners efforts to care for their property, Sandy volunteered to coordinate their knotweed injector loan-out program. Given her own intimidating stand of knotweed, she understood the challenges riverside owners face with controlling this massive plant and wanted to help her neighbors fight it. Stewardship in Action is a project of PRKC in cooperation with King County, that helps Patterson Creek and Raging River basin landowners protect the natural resources on their property. As part of this project, they are helping landowners control knotweed through special training workshops and the free use of knotweed injection-guns, as well the aquatic herbicide needed for this method, for any landowner who attends a workshop. If any landowner in either basin wants to control knotweed on their property, this is a great opportunity to get help. They just need to give Sandy a call or email and she can explain how it works. If landowners haven't attended a knotweed workshop yet, there is still one more available in upper Preston on August 28. Anyone interested in attending should contact Sandy to get more information. Sandy's email is sandyp@nwlink.com and her phone number is (425) 222-5206. For more information about PRKC or Stewardship in Action, see www.prkc.org or www.stewardshipinaction.org.

Miller-Walker Project Gets a Boost from the Community Salmon Fund

For the past four years, our noxious weed program has been working on control and eradication of several noxious weeds along Miller and Walker creeks in southwest King County. We have been working with the communities along the two creeks to control [policeman's helmet](#), [purple loosestrife](#), [giant hogweed](#), and [invasive knotweeds](#). Miller and Walker creeks are nestled into

surrounding urban and suburban development in Burien and Normandy Park and flow into the Puget Sound. Coho and chum salmon spawn in these creeks, as well as rainbow and cutthroat trout. The program received funding from the Port of Seattle for the project from 2006 to 2009 and, fortunately, we recently found out that we will be receiving a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Community Salmon Fund to continue work on the project in 2010 and 2011. The Community Salmon Fund program awards small-scale grants for salmon habitat protection and restoration projects that are marked by community involvement and watershed health benefits, and which are consistent with local salmon recovery plans. This grant will allow us to continue our efforts eradicating noxious weeds along the creeks, and begin to identify sites for restoration. The noxious weed program aims to maintain and increase the level of community involvement in the project, and will continue to work with the Normandy Park Community Club and the basin steward for the Miller and Walker creeks basin. In addition, this project will build on the communities' capacity to continue to work on invasive weed control on Miller and Walker creeks, as well as being able to begin restoration and replanting of areas where noxious weeds have been successfully removed. We have seen a significant reduction in the amount of noxious weeds on Miller and Walker creeks in the past couple of years that we have been working on the project, and are excited to continue the work.

Ski Hill Hawkweed Gets the Boot

Thanks to a lot of meetings and field trips to the pass, Ski Lifts, Inc., the company that runs the Snoqualmie Summit ski area, under the direction of manager Trevor Kostanich, has begun a long term program for controlling the rather intimidating and extensive infestations of [orange hawkweed](#) and other invasive hawkweeds on the ski slopes of Snoqualmie Pass. In fact, they are adding noxious weed control to their management plan for the private lands they manage as well as on the special use permit lands owned by the USFS. The Kittitas and King County noxious weed control programs mapped the extent of the hawkweed infestations and helped the company design and implement an improved vegetation management and weed control plan.

The Wenatchee and Mt Baker Snoqualmie National Forests, the Washington State Dept of Transportation, Mountain to Sound Greenway as well as the county weed boards are also actively involved in controlling invasive hawkweeds in the area in order to prevent them from spreading into alpine areas. Our program is also continuing our hawkweed control on the private properties of the Alpental neighborhood and seeing a good reduction in that area.

In addition, volunteers are hiking in the area looking for hawkweeds and other invasive weeds along the trails. In fact, when Weed Watcher volunteer George Macomber was surveying the Pacific Crest Trail south of I-90 where it crosses the ski area, he saw evidence of the hawkweed control effort and was able to point out skipped areas that the contractor will need to re-visit. George also found orange hawkweed up the Pacific Crest Trail on the north side of I-90, so this will be added to the list of places to control. If you are hiking in the Cascades and see orange or yellow hawkweed, be sure to call it in to the forest ranger or the county weed program. If we catch it early enough, we can prevent infestations like the one we have at Snoqualmie Pass, which will take many years and lots of resources to get rid of.

Friends of the Trail to Monitor for Noxious Weeds in Dump Sites

Have you ever seen a patch of [yellow archangel](#) spreading from a pile of garden clippings into the surrounding woods? It grows from stem fragments and spreads out like a carpet, crawling over and eventually crowding out everything else on the forest floor. The most disturbing sites are the ones in remote areas where yellow archangel spreads over acres of forest before anyone notices. This is happening all over King County (and elsewhere in western Washington)

and yellow archangel is only one of many noxious weeds being spread this way. The main problem is finding yard waste dump sites while they are still controllable. Fortunately, we just got an awesome ally to help us, Friends of the Trail. This is the group that is often the first responder for King County's illegal dumping problems. They seek out dump sites and respond to reports of illegal dumping and then haul out everything, no matter how huge or disgusting it is. Recently, Middle Fork volunteer Mark Boyar and I spent an afternoon with Wade from Friends of the Trail, going over identification of the key weeds we expect to see from yard waste dumping, giving him weed guides for the crew, and developing a plan for them to inspect dump sites and report to us if they see any invasive weeds. We are hopeful that this will allow us or others such as the Forest Service, WA DNR and King County Roads to respond quickly to new infestations along county and forest service roads before they get going. If you ever notice a yard waste dump site with weeds creeping out of it into the woods, especially noxious weeds like [yellow archangel](#), [knotweed](#), or [garlic mustard](#), please [report it to us](#) or your local weed board. This is called early detection and rapid response, and it's really the only way to go with tough invasive weeds. For more information about Friends of the Trail, see their website at www.friendsofthetrail.org.

River Users Join the Hunt for Knotweed and Butterfly Bush on the Middle Fork Snoqualmie

In our continual quest to rid the [Middle Fork Snoqualmie](#) of invasive weeds, we have begun to recruit the help of the folks who spend a lot of time on the river fishing and boating. We have developed handy [pocket-sized cards](#) asking for reports of [knotweed](#) and [butterfly bush](#) on the Middle Fork and [letter-size flyers](#) for posting on kiosks. Because there is very little knotweed and butterfly bush on this river, we really need help finding every last plant in order to keep it that way. These plants are still on roadways and landscapes in the area, so we realize it will be an ongoing effort to keep these invaders at bay on the river. If you like to boat or fish or otherwise enjoy the Middle Fork Snoqualmie, I'd be happy to send you an ID card for these plants. If you do see any knotweed or butterfly bush on the Middle Fork, we just ask that you email us the location (the more precise the better of course, so we can find it) include your contact information in case we can't find it, and mention that this is for the Middle Fork (we aren't able to track these weeds on our other rivers yet, although we hope to get to that point in the not so distant future).

A Nice Success Story – Neighbors Team up against Tansy Ragwort

With all the weeds out there and the sad stories in the news, it's nice to hear a success story once in awhile. Well, in one of our county's hotbeds of tansy ragwort, we got to see that happen this year. In 2009, there was a really impressively huge and dense infestation of tansy ragwort in a pasture that didn't get controlled in time before it went to seed. The neighbors, especially the ones with horses, were understandably upset. There started to be a lot of ill will between the neighbors. Our weed specialist for the area, Matt Below, was caught in the middle between lots of unhappy landowners. In order to turn things around, Matt stepped in with training, long conversations with all the neighbors, and a little bit of herbicide. It turned out that the owner of the large infestation was overwhelmed, but willing to do the right thing. This year, with his equipment and our herbicide, he did a great job controlling the tansy before it flowered, which went a long way to healing the rift with the neighbors. We also chipped in with help for the others who needed it, and everyone did their part to get the tansy controlled. Now, in August, there's no flowering tansy on any of the properties and everyone is content with the way we responded and the lovely lack of tansy ragwort. Not only are the property owners now educated about tansy ragwort and how to control it properly, but they are also talking to one another and helping each other out. We couldn't ask for a better ending.