Heather

Calluna vulgaris

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Ericaceae (heath)

Also known as
Heath, ling, Scotch heather

Where is it originally from?
Europe

What does it look like?
Bushy, evergreen tough shrub (<90 cm tall) with woody, wiry stems and densely hairy young shoots becoming hairless as they mature. Long dark green to brown leaves (1.5-3.5 mm long) are in opposite pairs on the stem, overlapping in four vertical rows. Bell-shaped, pink to pale purple flowers (2-4 mm long) on narrow, leafy, elongated, upright clusters (2-9 cm long, Dec-Mar) are followed by tiny, round, hairy seed capsules.

Are there any similar species?
Double flowered and white cultivars are sold that probably do not become weedy. Bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) has needle-like leaves and 6 mm long flowers. Berry heath (*E. baccans*) has leaves in whorls of four and ridges and depressions in the flower tube. Several large shrubby *Erica* species are similar.

Why is it weedy?
Forms dense stands, suckers and seeds profusely, and is faster growing than its subalpine competitors. Tolerates cold, high to low rainfall, semi shade, and poor soils, but is intolerant of heavy shade.

How does it spread?
Suckers are spread in soil and seed is spread by wind, water and soil movement.

What damage does it do?
Rapidly forms dense stands in low-growing habitats, preventing the establishment of native species.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Shrubland, short tussockland, herbfield, bare land, montane wetlands, and riverbeds, mostly in colder, subalpine areas with acid soils.

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - Pull or dig seedlings or small plants (all year round).
2. Cut and paste - Cut the stem/trunk as close to the ground as possible and cover the entire stump with herbicide as soon as possible after cutting. Apply metsulfuron gel (10g/L strength) or picloram gel (43g/l strength) to the entire cut stem.
3. Foliar spray (active spring growth) - Apply glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide (20ml/L) plus organosilicone penetrant (2ml/L) to cover entire plant Note: Non-selective. Avoid overspray onto desirable plants.
OR Apply Metsulfuron herbicide (600g/kg active ingredient) (Knapsack 0.5g/L, or Gun and hose 20-35g/L) plus organosilicone penetrant (3ml/L) to thoroughly wet all parts of plant. Note: Metsulfuron overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants and has residual activity in the soil which aids in killing below ground parts
OR Apply Triclopyr herbicide (600g/L active ingredient) at 6ml/L plus penetrant 1ml/L to thoroughly wet all parts of plant.
OR 2,4-D butyl ester (50ml/10L)
Note: Triclopyr and 2,4-D herbicides are ‘grass friendly’ but overspray

Photo: Trevor James

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Photo: Carolyn Lewis

will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants.
4. Biocontrol - Heather Beetle. See Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research website for further information: https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/discover-our-research/managing-invasive-species/weed-biocontrol/projects-agents/biocontrol-agents/heather-beetle
CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and directions for the purchase, use and storage of the product, are followed and adhered to.

What can I do to stop it coming back?
Suckers resprout and seeds germinate into bared areas, so avoid soil disturbance. Exclude livestock. Sites amongst taller regeneration may often be left for natural succession. Begin control at roadsides and bare margins to minimise spread. Follow up annually until eliminated.