Spanish heath

Erica lusitanica

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Ericaceae (heath)

Also known as
Heath, heather

Where is it originally from?
South West Europe

What does it look like?
Erect, evergreen shrub (<1-2+ m) with stems that are woody, brittle, and densely hairy when young. Fragrant, needle-like leaves (3-7 mm long) grow in whorls of 3-4 with the margins rolled under and touching, concealing the undersurface. Densely arranged clusters of bell-shaped, white (pink when in bud) flowers (3-5 mm long) at the end of stems (Mar-Dec), followed by a hairless seed capsule (3 mm long) containing many tiny seeds.

Are there any similar species?
Double flowered cultivars sold, but probably do not become weedy. Tree heath (*E. arborea*) grows to 5 m but is less weedy.

Why is it weedy?
Forms dense stands and produces many moderately long-lived seeds that are well dispersed. Tolerates wet to moderately dry conditions, warm to cold temperatures, poor soils, little shade, and damage (not readily grazed).

How does it spread?
Wind, soil and water movement. Common seed sources include poor pasture, roadsides and railway banks, wasteland, and slips.

What damage does it do?
Forms dense stands, especially on disturbed and bare sites, and prevents the establishment of native plant seedlings. Usually succeeded by native plants in tall-growing plant communities, but is long-lived in shorter vegetation.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Disturbed shrubland especially low-growing types on acidic soils, fernland, tussockland, herbfield, and bare land.

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - Hand pull small plants, or dig out entire plant including roots (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 a gel/mixture of glyphosate gel (120g/L strength) + metsulfuron (10g/l strength), Or Picloram gel (43 g/l) to the entire cut stem.
3. Foliar spray - 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 Triclopyr herbicide (600g/L active ingredient) at 6ml/L plus organosilicone penetrant (1ml/L) to thoroughly wet all parts of plant OR Apply Picloram/triclopyr herbicide (picloram 100g/l and triclopyr 300g/l active ingredient) at 6ml/L plus organosilicone penetrant (1ml/L) to thoroughly wet all parts of plant. Note: Triclopyr and picloram herbicides are 'grass friendly' but overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants. Picloram has residual activity in the soil which may leach through soil and kill other plants. Do not use under and around other (desirable) broadleaf plants.

Photo: Trevor James

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Photo: Carolyn Lewis

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?
Cut stems resprout. Reseeds freely in bared areas. Regenerating tall vegetation can often be left for natural succession, can be assisted by selective slashing. Exclude livestock, avoid fire and disturbance, minimise spraying. Replant bare sites. Spreading lime heavily often kills or reduces vigour sufficiently to allow succession, but may have similar undesirable impacts on some native species.