

Heather

Calluna vulgaris

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. Ensure heather beetle is present if possible.
2. Stump swab: metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (1g) + glyphosate (100ml) per L water or picloram gel.
3. Spray (active spring growth only): 2,4-D butyl ester (50ml/10L).

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.



www.weedbusters.org.nz



Photo: Carolyn Lewis



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