

Ulex europaeus - Growing Guide

Growing Ulex Europaeus

Common gorse

You may well wonder why any nursery could possibly bother growing something so invasive, rampant and self-seeding in our countryside. It does however have its uses or role in the garden in a few key aspects. Those whose gardens edge onto fields with sheep or cattle in them may well want something inedible to them as a protective hedge when the fencing rots away. Those who simply want to keep unwelcome visitors out of their garden with a nasty prickly plant may think in the same way. Similarly those who are creating new gardens in coastal situations near cliff edges or in extreme exposure on a hill, perhaps in the north of England, may well want a dense evergreen windbreak to filter the wind before it hits and damages more choice plants in its lee. New windbreaks need to contain several layers of protection with gorse as the outer layer. You would perhaps be surprised by the demand we get for this common native plant for these reasons.

The double flowered gorse, *Ulex flore pleno*, perhaps has a place in a very wild garden for its attractive flowers and it can earn its place in a shrub border if clipped hard to keep it under control. We deliberately grow a plant on the drive in Burncoose Gardens to prove the point and it has at least a few admirers.

U. europaeus flowers between March and May with further intermittent flowering right through the year. Its pea-flowers are chrome yellow and scented. They make a superb display on a hot dry bank but this is, of course, a densely branched shrub with vicious spines.

If pot grown plants are planted out (rather than seedlings) they have a tendency to become leggy and, after flowering, a hard pruning taking the plants down to 2-3in in height will ensure a more bushy plant thereafter.

Gorse will self-sow itself onto any bare patch of ground which it will quickly colonise. If a clump gets completely out of control a box of matches can soon solve the problem providing there is nothing else that will get burnt at the same time.



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