

Spanish heath

Erica lusitanica

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. Hand pull seedlings.
2. Spray (active spring growth only): 2,4-D ester (50ml/10L).

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.



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Photo: Carolyn Lewis



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