



Scientific Name:

Spartium junceum

English:

Spanish Broom

Maltese:

il-ġenista s-safra

The Spanish Broom is a native evergreen large shrub or small tree from the pea family. It reaches a maximum height of around 5m, is spineless, and characterised by many rush-like, green branches, which give this tree its peculiar appearance. In fact, the branches are green and are virtually leafless throughout the year, bearing very small sparse simple leaves, which are generally short-lived, falling in the dry season. On the other hand, the flowers are particularly conspicuous, these being sweetly-scented large yellow flowers, borne between April and June, either singly or in small clusters along the younger twigs.

The fruits are long and flat; these are at first covered with short hairs which later become smooth and black when mature. As a dispersal mechanism, the seed-pods split open, often with an audible crack, to disperse the numerous seeds found inside.

The species is critically endangered in the Maltese Islands, and only a few native specimens still exist in the wild. It is sometimes planted in public gardens and other areas due to its peculiar habit and conspicuous flowers. Legume plants, such as the Spanish Broom, are also known for their ability to replenish the soil with nitrogen – they are able to do this because they host nitrogen-fixing bacteria in their roots. The relationship between the plant and the bacteria is a mutualistic one, meaning that both the shrub and the bacteria benefit from this association.

The Spanish Broom has a number of uses in different countries; it is occasionally used for making brooms or even weaved into baskets, and is also used to produce yellow dye and essential oils. The Spanish Broom is considered to be a strictly protected shrub under national legislation and one should not prune, fell or uproot specimens of this species without previously obtaining the necessary permits.

