

Heather

Calluna vulgaris

Family Ericaceae

Identification

- **Evergreen**, low growing, dense perennial shrub up to 90 cm high
- Bushy, woody **stems branch** many times to form thick mats
- Small **scale-like leaves** overlap along wiry stems
- Leaves are **dark green**, turning brown (approx 1.5 – 3.5 mm long)
- Small **pink/pale purple** bell-shaped flowers appear from December to March
- **Seed capsules** are small, round and hairy



Heather flowering. Photo: P Blaxter (DOC)



Heather leaves. Top photo: K. Weston. Heather in flower. Lower photo: P. Blaxter (DOC)

Status

Heather has been declared an unwanted organism under the Biosecurity Act 1993, which makes it illegal to knowingly release or spread, display or sell, breed, propagate or otherwise distribute this species. We are interested in sightings of heather only if seen **growing wild** in Canterbury. Please report sightings to (03) 363 9380 or email weeds@ecan.govt.nz.

Control

Contact your Regional Council for advice on control methods.

Where is it found?

Heather is a common garden plant, known to be an invasive weed of tussock grasslands in several areas of New Zealand. It is a serious problem in Tongariro National Park. In Canterbury we have found it growing wild in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park and in the Tekapo area.

Why is it a problem?

Where conditions are suitable, heather can exclude other low-growing vegetation. It forms dense mats, making the environment unsuitable for native plants and animals. An extremely hardy species (can tolerate cold temperatures and poor soils), heather is easily spread vegetatively and by seed. Seed can also be transported by machinery, on clothing/foot wear and by stock.



Heather invading native shrubland. Photo: P Blaxter (DOC)