



## ISLAND COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED PROGRAM WEED ALERT

*Daphne laureola*

### Spurge Laurel

Thymelaeaceae Family

#### Class B Noxious Weed: Control Required

#### Identification Tips

- Evergreen shrub that grows up to 5 feet tall
- Whorls of dark green, shiny, leathery leaves grow at the end of the branches
- Leaves are oblong in shape, 1-5 inches long and ½ to 1 inch wide
- Small (< ½ inch long) tubular yellow-green flowers grow in clusters at the base of the leaves, near the tops of stems
- Oval, one-seeded, black berries are produced in early summer

#### Biology

- Flowering occurs from late January to late March or early April
- Reproduces both by seed and vegetatively, by sprouting from lateral roots
- Although the berries are poisonous to humans, dogs and cats, birds eat them, which aids in seed dispersal
- Can grow in a wide range of conditions, but it thrives in full to partial shade and well-drained soils



*Spurge laurel is an attractive shrub that has escaped from gardens and naturalized in woodlands and other shady places*



*The spurge laurel flowers, which are sometimes fragrant, grow in small clusters at the base of the leaves*

#### Impacts

- Spurge laurel has escaped cultivation, primarily near residential developments where birds eat its fruit and disperse the seeds into nearby forests
- The shrub rapidly forms monotypic stands that outcompete native understory plants
- Once established, this plant is very difficult to eradicate
- Spurge laurel is a serious threat to certain native forest ecosystems particularly Garry oak woodlands and dry Madrone/Douglas fir forests in the San Juan Islands and coastal British Columbia

#### Questions?

**Call the Island County Noxious Weed Control Board: 360-678-7992**

<http://ext100.wsu.edu/island/nrs/noxious>

## What You Can Do

The Island County Noxious Weed Board recognizes the invasiveness of this plant and requires property owners to control it. A key element is preventing new infestations. While spurge laurel is no longer sold at nurseries as an ornamental, some people have dug this plant from escaped populations and transplanted it into their gardens or shared plants with others. Do not collect spurge laurel plants from the wild because they will likely produce berries and start infestations in other areas. If a volunteer spurge laurel starts growing on your property, pull it up and dispose of it immediately.

## Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons.

**Manual:** Caution must be used when controlling spurge laurel by hand. The plants produce a caustic sap that can cause severe skin and eye irritation. Always wear protective clothing, gloves and eye protection, and never transport plants or cut material inside an enclosed vehicle because the caustic compounds also cause respiratory irritation.

Seedlings and young plants can be hand-pulled. Hand-pulling is most effective in moist loose soils where a slow and steady pulling will remove 6 to 8 inches or more of root. Larger plants can be pulled with a weed wrench or similar tool. The Island County Noxious Weed Program does lend out weed wrenches upon request. All of the root should be removed to avoid regrowth from root sprouts. After pulling, the area should be monitored for new seedlings and covered with deep mulch if possible.

*Spurge laurel plants will often resprout if the plant is cut without removing the roots*



**Mechanical:** Plants up to 3 years old can be fairly effectively (up to 95% mortality) with a weed whip or similar tool by cutting the plant close to the ground level. Older plants should be cut below the soil line to minimize resprouting. Volatile plant toxins may be released during cutting, so protective gear is recommended.

**Chemical:** Spot spraying with products containing the active ingredient triclopyr have been found to be effective. For effective control spray each plant on the leaves and stems until they are wet but not dripping. Broadcast applications (spraying an entire area of vegetation) are not recommended. Triclopyr is considered selective, but will injure any other broadleaf plants that it comes in contact with. An effective method that uses less herbicide is the cut stem and paint method. Cut the stem(s) of the plant close to the ground and immediately paint the cut stem(s) using a one inch foam brush with an undiluted herbicide such as triclopyr or glyphosate.



**Disposal:** Pulled plants can be disposed of free of charge at the Island County Transfer Station in Coupeville. If the plants are with berries, clip the ends of the branches with berries and place them in garbage bags before transferring to avoid spreading the seed to new areas.

*Left uncontrolled, spurge laurel can quickly overtake the forest understory, forming monotypic stands, displacing native ecosystems*