

# Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola*

## About

This shrub is native to Western Europe and the Mediterranean and introduced into North America as a garden ornamental. It is tolerant of both sun and shade and can rapidly take over native vegetation in a range of ecosystems by forming dense thickets.

Spurge laurel is listed as a toxic plant by Worksafe BC.

**Other Names:** Daphne laurel, Daphne.



## Legal Status

The Community Charter, Spheres of Concurrent Jurisdiction – Environment and Wildlife Regulation ([https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/144\\_2004](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/144_2004)) lists Spurge laurel as an alien an alien invasive species, terrestrial vascular plant. BC Inter-Ministry Invasive Species Working Group designates it a provincial Management species.

## Distribution

Spurge laurel is found in southwestern British Columbia including Vancouver, southern Vancouver Island, and the Gulf Islands.



D. Hanna

## Identification

**Flowers:** In the early spring, tiny, four-lobed, fragrant, flowers form in clusters of 2-10 between the leaves. They are light green, yellow in colour with orange stamens.

**Stems:** Many brown stems may grow up from one root, but limited branching occurs. Plants can grow to 1.5 m in height.

**Leaves:** Dark green, glossy, oval-shaped, 4-13 cm in length and grow in a spiral pattern around the top of the stem. As the plant grows taller, only the topmost section retains leaves.

**Fruits:** Immature fruit are bright green, turning black when ripe. They are 8-11 mm in size.

**Similar Species:** Often mistaken for Rhododendron.



ISCBC



R. Vrtáček; Bugwood.org

## Ecological Characteristics

**Habitat:** Spurge laurel thrives in full to partial shade and well-drained soils, though it can survive in a range of conditions.

**Reproduction:** Spurge laurel flowers are self-fertilizing. This is when pollen from the same plant arrives at the flower. This way, the plant does not rely on pollinators to reproduce.

**Dispersal:** Fruits are readily spread by birds and rodents. This is the primary means of dispersal, although the plant can grow new shoots from existing plant roots.

## Impacts

**Ecological:** Often expands into forested areas adjacent to urban areas. It is a particular threat to Garry Oak and Douglas fir ecosystems where it can form dense thickets and crowd out native plants. It can also change soil chemistry by producing substances that are toxic to neighbouring plants.

**Economic:** Increased maintenance costs of large stands of Spurge laurel can impact property owners and agriculture industries.

**Social:** Major health risk to humans and pets, it is extremely toxic and cause skin rashes, blistering, nausea, and swelling of the tongue.

## Integrated Pest Management

*IPM is a decision-making process that includes identification and inventory of invasive plant populations, assessment of the risks that they pose, development of well-informed control options that include several methods for site treatment, and monitoring.*

**Prevention:** Spurge laurel is a garden escapee, once a popular ornamental due to its glossy, rhododendron-like leaves and fragrant flowers. Be PlantWise (<https://bcinvasives.ca/play-your-part/plantwise/>), and do not choose this plant for your garden. See the Grow Me Instead Guide (<https://bcinvasives.ca/play-your-part/plantwise/grow-me-instead/>) and plant non-invasive alternatives instead such as Oregon grape, Evergreen huckleberry, Japanese azalea, or Winter daphne.



**Mechanical Control:** Always use Personal Protective Equipment (including eye protection) as all parts of the plant are toxic. Sap can cause skin irritation and consumption of any plant parts (including the berries) can be fatal.

Small plants can be pulled by hand, while larger plants can be removed with mechanical assistance, shovels or a weed pulling tool. Be sure to remove the entire root so the plant does not resprout. Repeated cutting at the base of the plant will eventually kill it but digging out the roots is recommended. Removal of large stands can allow the seed bank to sprout so the area should be monitored for seedlings and covered with a deep mulch to prevent regrowth.

**Chemical Control:** Herbicide recommendations and use must consider site characteristics and be prescribed based on site goals and objectives. Herbicide labels and other sources of information must be reviewed before selecting and applying herbicides.

There are herbicides that effectively control Spurge laurel, therefore contact your local invasive plant specialist for recommendations. Pay special attention to local restrictions and labelled instructions when using an herbicide.

Application of pesticides on Crown land must be carried out following a confirmed Pest Management Plan (*Integrated Pest Management Act*) and under the supervision of a certified pesticide applicator. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/pesticides-pest-management>.

**Biological Control:** There is currently no species approved for biocontrol in BC.

**Disposal:** Note: Disposal of invasive plants varies by region. Contact your local government for specific information on how to dispose your invasive plants.

Do not compost in home compost bin.

## Reporting

Report by using the mobile Report-Invasives-BC app for Apple and Android platforms [bcinvasives.ca/report](https://bcinvasives.ca/report). <https://bcinvasives.ca/take-action/report/>.

Report online to the ISCBC at [info@bcinvasives.ca](mailto:info@bcinvasives.ca) or 1-888-933-3722. <https://bcinvasives.ca/take-action/report/>.

## References/Links

<https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/animals-and-plants/noxious-weeds/weed-identification/spurge-laurel.aspx>.

[https://www.nwcb.wa.gov/images/weeds/Spurge-Laurel-Control\\_Whatcom.pdf](https://www.nwcb.wa.gov/images/weeds/Spurge-Laurel-Control_Whatcom.pdf).

<https://www.worksafebc.com/resources/health-safety/information-sheets/toxic-plant-warning/severe-skin-irritation-from-spurge-laurel-daphne-laureola?lang=en&direct>.

