

# Spurge Laurel

(*Daphne laureola*)

**Description:** Spurge laurel is an evergreen shrub that grows up to 3-4 feet tall. Whorls of dark green, shiny, leathery leaves grow at the ends of the branches. Leaves are oblong in shape, 1-5 inches long and ½ to 1 inch wide. Spurge laurel blooms in late winter and early spring, producing small (less than ½ inch long) tubular, yellow-green flowers. The flowers, which are sometimes fragrant, grow in small clusters at the base of leaves, near the tops of the stems. Oval, black berries are produced in early summer. Spurge laurel is slow-growing and long-lived.



**Impacts:** Spurge laurel, a shrub native to Western Europe and the Mediterranean, was introduced into North America as a garden ornamental. It has escaped cultivation, invading roadsides, parks and wooded areas. Spurge laurel can replace native understory plants in forested areas, and can form large single-species stands. It tolerates a wide range of environmental conditions, but grows best in partial to deep shade. Spurge laurel reproduces both by seed and vegetatively, by sprouting from lateral roots. The berries are eaten by birds, which aids in seed dispersal. Spurge laurel contains toxins in its berries, stem, leaves and sap which are poisonous to humans, as well as to dogs and cats, the sap can cause severe skin and eye irritation.

**Control Options:** Thurston County's Integrated Pest Management emphasizes cultural, biological, and manual control methods to keep pests and vegetation problems low enough to prevent damage. The strategy of Thurston County's IPM policy is to minimize the use of pesticides.

## ► Cultural / Habitat

A key element in Integrated Pest Management is preventing infestations. While spurge laurel is no longer sold in 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 new areas. Also, wash off muddy boots and shoes, tools, vehicles and pets after visiting parks, forests or other areas where spurge laurel is growing.

## ► Manual / Mechanical

**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 plant material inside an enclosed vehicle because the caustic compounds can also cause respiratory irritation.**

Hand pulling spurge laurel is highly effective where plants are small or where only a few plants are present (16 to 20 or considerably more if plants pull easily). It is most effective in moist, loose soils where a slow and steady pulling action will remove 6 to 8 inches or more of root. Some new plants may emerge from roots of older plants that are broken off close to the soil surface. Sites should be monitored at least annually, controlling regrowth and seedlings when they appear. Plants that are cut off at or above the soil surface will re-sprout and will subsequently become much more difficult to remove. Plants that have been removed should be bagged and taken to a Thurston County Waste & Recovery Center where they can be deposited free of charge for Thurston County landowners. Clip and bag ends of branches with ripe berries before digging in order to prevent spreading seeds into new areas.



## ► Biological

There are currently no biological control methods available for controlling spurge laurel.

## ► Chemical

Spot spraying with *triclopyr* has been found to be effective in controlling spurge laurel. Triclopyr is a selective herbicide that will not kill grass when used according to label instructions, but will damage or kill other broadleaf plants that it may contact. Triclopyr products are rated as “moderate in hazard” by Thurston County’s pesticide review process because broadcast applications of triclopyr at greater than 2 lbs of active ingredient per acre can result in contaminating the food supply for birds and small animals. Since this prescription recommends only spraying individual plants or small patches, the risk to birds and small animals is greatly reduced.

***Thurston County has observed that most ready-to-use, pre-mixed products do not contain sufficient active ingredients to be as effective as concentrated products that are then mixed with water to create a specific finished concentration. Look for concentrated products (at least 8%), and triclopyr is the ONLY active ingredient listed on the label.***



*Spurge laurel threatens native habitats, especially Garry oak woodlands and dry Madrone/Douglas fir forests in Northwest coastal regions.*

Lilly Miller’s liquid concentrate “Blackberry and Brush Killer” and Ortho’s “Brush-B-Gon Poison Ivy Killer Concentrate” are examples (be sure to double check the ingredient list as products frequently change formulations). Follow label instructions for application rates for controlling woody plants and brush.

### **Foliar applications of triclopyr:**

- Spot application means the herbicide is applied only to the plants and not on the surrounding plants or soil. Spray each plant thoroughly on the foliage, enough to be wet but not dripping.
- Triclopyr is a selective, broadleaf weed killer and can injure any plants that it comes in contact with, except for grass. Care should be used to avoid contact with ornamentals and other desirable plants.
- Keep people and pets off treated areas until spray solution has dried.

### **Timing:**

To prevent seed production, treat spurge laurel plants any time from bud to late blooming stage, when appropriate conditions listed on the label occur. Clip and bag ends of branches with berries before treating in order to prevent seeds from ripening and further infesting the area. Small amounts of seeds and plant material should be carefully double bagged and placed in the trash (not yard waste), and larger amounts of bagged spurge laurel plant material can be taken to Thurston County Waste & Recovery Center free of charge.

**Pollinator Protection:** To minimize negative impacts to bees and other pollinators, treatment prior to blooming is recommended. Removal of flowers before treatment can be an option in some situations. If treatment must occur during the blooming period, try to spray early or late in the day or on cloudy, cool days when pollinators are least active.

**READ AND FOLLOW ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS AND RESTRICTIONS.** Obey all label precautions including site specific and safety measures. Always use personal protective equipment that includes coveralls, chemical resistant gloves, shoes plus socks, and protective eyewear. Use of brand names does not connote endorsement and is for reference only; other formulations of the same herbicides may be available under other names. Information provided is current as of the date of the fact sheet. Pesticide product registration is renewed annually. Product names and formulations may vary from year to year.

### **REFERENCES:**

Written Findings of the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board

[http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed\\_info/written\\_findings/CLASS%20B%20PDFs/daphne\\_laureola\\_draft.pdf](http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed_info/written_findings/CLASS%20B%20PDFs/daphne_laureola_draft.pdf)

Evergreen *Invasive Plant Profile* [http://www.evergreen.ca/docs/res/invasives/spurgelaurel\\_factSheet.pdf](http://www.evergreen.ca/docs/res/invasives/spurgelaurel_factSheet.pdf)

Canadian Forest Service Natural Resources Program Natural Resources Notes Number 1, 2003

Invasive Species in Garry Oak and Associated Ecosystems in British Columbia, *Daphne laureola* [www.goert.ca](http://www.goert.ca)

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