

Rhododendron ponticum and was first introduced to Britain around 1763 as a cultivated flowering plant. It then became especially popular on country estates in Victorian times, providing ornamental value, as well as cover for game birds. It was also used as a rootstock for cultivated, hybrid rhododendrons.

Wild 'naturalised' *Rhododendron* (in this leaflet this name refers specifically to *R. ponticum*) in Britain is thought to have derived mainly from Spanish and Portuguese introductions.

In the twentieth century a lack of awareness of the need for its control has allowed *Rhododendron* to invade large areas of the Highlands.

Facts

The plant colonises areas by both stem layering and seed dispersal.

Stem layering occurs when horizontal branches come into contact with suitable moist conditions on the ground and take root.

Flowering commences when the plant is 10-12 years old.

The plant survives well in nutrient poor soils due to mycorrhizal (fungal) associations established with heathland plants such as heather.

Grazing animals generally avoid *Rhododendron* due to the bad taste of the leaf, which contains toxins.

Precautionary Note:

Phytophthora ramorum and *P. kernoviae* are fungus-like plant pathogens which attack a wide range of trees and shrubs, and have the potential to cause significant damage in gardens, woodlands and heathland. *Rhododendron* is a host species.

www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-66ths4

How to find out more

'Managing and Controlling Invasive *Rhododendron*' - produced by the Forestry Commission is a very informative practical guide.

www.forestresearch.gov.uk

'Managing *Rhododendron ponticum* as an invasive species'

Advisory sheet available at-
www.highlandbiodiversity.com

For further information on the Lever and Mulch technique visit-
www.leverandmulch.co.uk

SRDP website and online application form can be found at-
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Rural/SRDP/RuralPriorities

This is one in a series of leaflets produced on behalf of the Highland Invasive Species Forum to highlight the threats of non-native invasive species.

For more information on the Forum, visit
www.highlandbiodiversity.com

For further information contact:
Highland Council Biodiversity Officer
T:01463 702274
www.highlandbiodiversity.com
Large print versions available

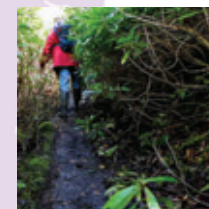


INVASIVE
NON-NATIVE
SPECIES



Rhododendron ponticum

AN INVASIVE SPECIES



Why the need for control?

Rhododendron is one of the most invasive plant species in the Highlands and its rate of expansion is increasing.

This plant's invasive and competitive nature has led to the decline in quality of many areas of native habitat it has colonised including woodlands, heathlands and watercourses.

Where conditions are suitable, Rhododendron grows to create a tangle of woody stems with a dense canopy. These thickets shut out most of the light at ground level and so eliminate native plants, mosses, lichens and fungi and the associated wildlife.

Rhododendron thrives in a mild, wet climate and on nutrient-poor acidic soils so it has spread widely across the west Highlands. Mature bushes are a prolific seed source that aids further spread. The more established it is, the more difficult and costly it is to remove.



Control methods

Eradication is generally accomplished through a combination of physical and chemical means with follow-up treatments over several years. Before undertaking a control programme, it is essential to complete a ground survey and prioritise which areas will be cleared first.

Manual Control

Seedlings and young plants can be pulled up by hand or grubbed out with a mattock, taking care not to leave fragments of bud-bearing material in the soil. Mature bushes can be cut back to the stump; the brash may be burned, chipped or left to rot down. There should be clear access for follow up chemical treatment to prevent regrowth from stumps.

The 'Lever and Mulch' technique is a manual approach which avoids the use of herbicides by removing all of the bud bearing plant material. This is done by exploiting natural weaknesses in the plant and using its own stems as levers to remove the plant from the ground. Where the whole plant cannot be removed, the bark and any buds remaining within the bud zone are physically destroyed. The brash is left in situ to form a mulch that can prevent seedlings establishing.

Chemical Control

Bushes less than 1.3m tall can be treated with an approved herbicide and adjuvant applied to all leaves using a knapsack sprayer.



Bushes over 1.3m need to be cut back and then sprayed in the next growing season. Fresh-cut stumps can also be treated with herbicide.

Mature bushes can be tackled using 'stem treatment'. A small amount of chemical is applied into every stem by cutting into the cambium with a hatchet, or creating a well with a battery operated drill.

Mechanical Control

Machine-mounted flails and mulch heads can also be effective on suitable terrain.

All types of control should only be undertaken by suitably experienced or qualified practitioners.

Precautionary Note:

It is an offence to knowingly disturb protected species such as Otter, Wildcat, Pine Marten and Badger which may den in rhododendron thickets. Checking the site for dens is strongly advised. More advice is available at: www.scottishbadgers.org.uk

Funding Rhododendron Control

The Scottish Rural Development Programme – Rural Priorities (SRDP – RP) funding mechanism supports Rhododendron eradication. At some designated sites you may be eligible for up to 100% of actual costs.

