



Photo: Jon Wagner, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District



## SPURGE LAUREL (*Daphne laureola*)

4-County CWMA Class B  
Oregon Class B  
Washington Class B



Photo: Whatcom County

### Overview

Spurge laurel, a broadleaf shrub native to Europe and the Mediterranean, was originally introduced as an ornamental plant in the Pacific Northwest. It grows well in heavy shade and thrives in understory plant communities. Once established, it can form dense thickets and outcompete native flowers and shrubs. Plants can either grow upright or droop over and “crawl” over the soil. This plant spreads by seed. The berries, leaves and bark are poisonous if eaten, and the sap can cause contact dermatitis and respiratory irritation. **Do not handle without appropriate precautions.**

### How to Identify

Spurge laurel is evergreen, broadleaved, and grows to 3-5 feet tall. Leaves are thick and waxy, and grow in dense **whorls at the end of bare stems**. Older leaves are dark green but newer growth can be a lighter yellow-green. Stems are green to grayish-green. **Flowers are small, green, and in clusters of 5-20; they grow between the leaves near the top of the stems.** Berries are spherical to egg-shaped, turning from green to purple-black as they ripen.

### Look-alikes

Spurge laurel may look similar to laurel varieties or rhododendrons and are often found growing alongside these species. Spurge laurel can be distinguished from these plants because of its long, thin, shiny, dark olive-green leaves and its distinctive clusters of small flowers below the top whorl of leaves.

### When to Remove

Spurge laurel flowers in late winter/early spring, and the growing season occurs nearly year-round. It's best to remove plants before berries ripen and when the ground is wet (late winter/early spring).

### Other Control Methods

Use herbicide control methods only for large infestations where manual and mechanical removal becomes impractical. For any herbicide applications we urge you to work with a licensed herbicide applicator. To learn more, consult the best management practices provided by the 4-County Cooperative Weed Management Area ([www.4countycwma.org/AWeeds/Best-Management-Practices/](http://www.4countycwma.org/AWeeds/Best-Management-Practices/)). If any information provided contradicts the label, the label takes precedence. Always read and follow the label on any herbicide product you are using!

Please contact your local weed program in either Oregon ([www.Oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Weeds/Pages/CountyWeedPrograms.aspx](http://www.Oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Weeds/Pages/CountyWeedPrograms.aspx)) or Washington ([www.NWCB.wa.gov/Find-Your-County-Weed-Boards](http://www.NWCB.wa.gov/Find-Your-County-Weed-Boards)) for more information about how to control this invasive weed.



The mission of the 4-County Cooperative Weed Management Area, comprising Clackamas, Clark, Multnomah, and Washington Counties, is to create and support collaborative weed management in the greater Portland area. For more details on our collaborative efforts in management, mapping, and outreach, please visit our website:

[www.4CountyCWMA.org](http://www.4CountyCWMA.org)





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## Prevention

This species was formerly sold as an ornamental and is still found in many gardens. Birds and small mammals eat spurge laurel fruits and spread seeds into natural areas. Early identification and removal of spurge laurel prior to fruiting is crucial to preventing its spread.

## Manual Control Method

### THIS METHOD SHOULD

#### BE USED WHEN:

- Terrain is flat or gently sloped
- Invasion is located near surface water
- There are desired plants in or around invasion

### TOOLS YOU NEED:

- Loppers/hand pruners/machetes
- Shovel or weed wrench
- Bag for seeds/flowers
- Gloves

1. Prepare by wearing clothing that covers all skin that may come in contact with spurge laurel sap or plant parts.
2. If plants have seeds or flowers, carefully CLIP all seed heads and place in a plastic bag before removing plants. Label the bag **"Invasive plant material - Do NOT compost"** and dispose of it in the trash.
3. When soil is moist, PULL small shrubs out of the ground using gloves. If the spurge laurel is too large to be pulled, use a weed wrench to dislodge the plant with as much root matter as possible from the soil. A shovel may also be used to dig the plant and its root.



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4. Due to the toxic nature of this plant, **home composting is not recommended**. Dispose of plants in a plastic bag and place in the trash or compost in a composting facility or a curb-side composting bin **ONLY** if seed heads have been removed. Alternatively, PILE stems and debris and allow to dry on the soil surface away from people and pets. **NEVER** dump clippings in parks or natural areas.
5. PLANT native or non-invasive plants in the control area after the bulk of the invasive plants are removed. This will help repopulate the area with desired species and prevent new and recurring infestations.
6. MONITOR area for re-sprouts. Spurge laurel root fragments will continue to grow and produce new plants. After initial removal, the area needs to be managed every few months to remove new growth.



Photo: Sarah Patton



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