

Rhododendron ponticum

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Rhododendron ponticum*

AKA: Rhododendron

Native to: South-west Europe and south-west Asia.
Northern Ireland's stock is believed to have come from Spain

Habitat: Common on acid, peaty or sandy soils in woodland, heathland, rocky hillsides, rivers banks, gardens and parks

A large evergreen shrub with leathery leaves, attractive purple to pink flowers and solid stems forming into a trunk when mature. Relatively easy to identify by its distinctive flowers but can be confused with cherry laurel or horticultural varieties of rhododendron. However, horticultural varieties of rhododendron are relatively rarely found in the wild. Spreads by suckers and seed, which are small and carried long distances by wind.

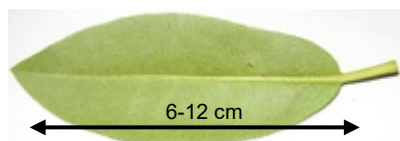
Introduced by gardeners in the late 18th century into parks and woodlands, where it was also used for game cover. Still widely planted, particularly by gardeners. Often grows in ecologically sensitive habitats, such as heath, broad-leaved woodland and dunes, where dense growth out-competes native plants and can considerably alter the structure of the habitat. Rhododendron can also prevent access to sites by the sheer mass of plant material blocking paths and right of way.



Key ID Features



Leathery leaves
with dull green
upper surface



Pale underside



Leaves in spiral
at end of stem



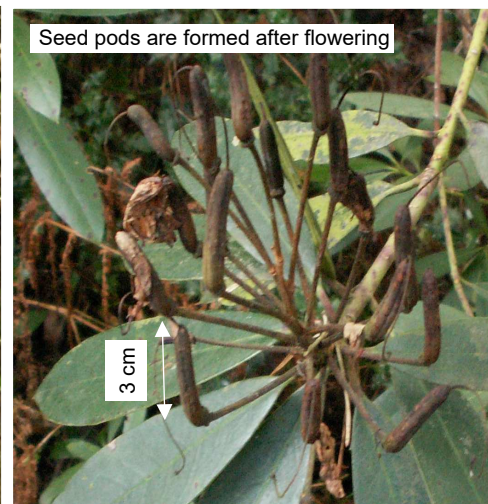
Stem usually up to 15cm
diameter and 5m tall

Stems / trunk often dense and twisted



Usually pink / purple, occasionally whiteish

5 petals



Seed pods are formed after flowering

3 cm

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

Varies little throughout the year as leaves are evergreen and woody stems remain the same. Flowers appear May to June followed by seed pods.

Cherry laurel

Non-native
(*Prunus laurocerasus*)



Rhododendron leaf
(for comparison)



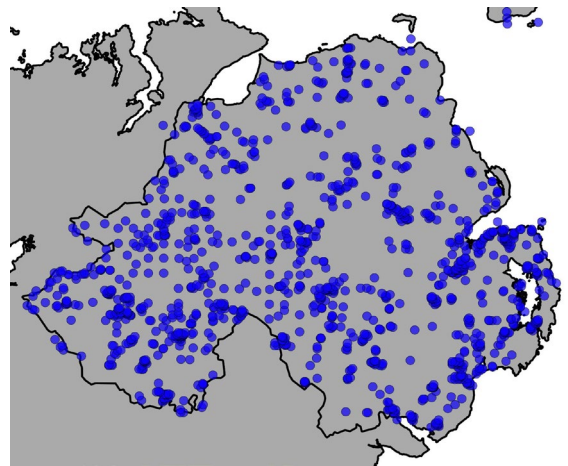
Cherry laurel leaf

Toothed edge



Distribution

Widespread throughout Northern Ireland



Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland

<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NBNSYS0000003888>

Check website for current distribution

Varieties of Rhododendron

There are a large number of highly sought after species and varieties of rhododendron, of which the invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* is just one. It is unusual to encounter other varieties or species outside of planted habitats.

References in the further reading list can be used to distinguish between the different varieties if necessary.

Examples of rhododendron varieties:



References and further reading:

Cullen, J (2005) "*Hardy rhododendron species: a guide to identification*". Collins

Preston, C D and Croft, J M (1997) "*Aquatic plants in Britain and Ireland*". Harley Books
Preston, C D, Pearman, D A and Dines, T A (editors) (2002) "*New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*". Oxford University Press

Stace, C (1999) "*Field Flora of the British Isles*". Cambridge University Press

Photos from: Olaf Booy, David Fenwick, Mike McCabe, Helen Parish.

Adapted for Northern Ireland
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