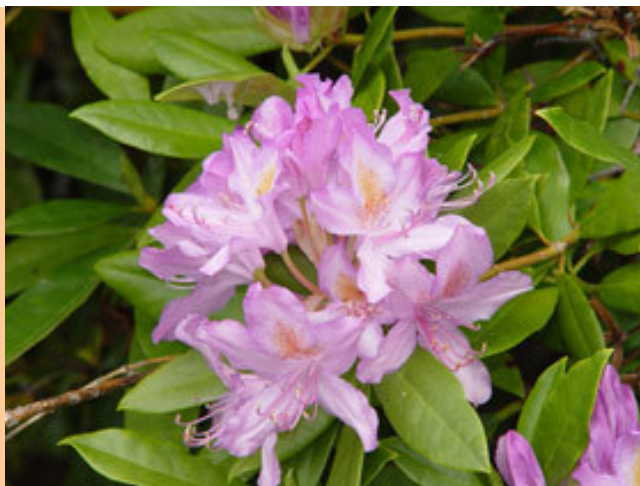


Rhododendron Ponticum

Rhododendron ponticum

**Progressive Control Plant under the
West Coast Regional Pest Plant
Management Strategy**



National Pest Plant Accord Status

Rhododendron ponticum is listed in the 2008 National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) and is banned from sale, propagation and distribution in New Zealand. For more information refer to the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand website at www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa

Where has Rhododendron ponticum come from?

A native of Europe and Asia Minor (Turkey), Rhododendron ponticum was introduced into New Zealand as an ornamental and hardy garden plant in the early days of European settlement. It has also been used as rootstock in the propagation of other less hardy rhododendron species. On the West Coast it is found most often around old homesteads or settlements, and nearby in the wild. Efforts are being made to ensure it does not spread further down into South Westland.

What does Rhododendron ponticum look like?

This rhododendron, which looks similar to many other rhododendron species, is a robust, evergreen shrub growing to 6m on the West Coast. The new flush of spring leaves are bright green but darken to a dark green over the winter. Flower colour is variable from light lilac-pink through to darker pinks or pinkish-purple.

Plants take around 12 years to mature after which set annual prolific and very viable seeds which are spread by the wind. The plants can also spread vegetatively by suckering of the roots and layering of the branches where they droop and touch the ground. Rhododendron ponticum is the only rhododendron which does this and this is a key identification feature.

Why is Rhododendron ponticum a Pest Plant?

Rhododendron ponticum spreads readily forming dense thickets which starve other/native plants of light, making it difficult for them to get established.

The plant has a further competitive edge in that the leaves contain chemicals which deter leaf browsing animals. Well established thickets eventually form a toxic layer of leaf litter which in turn further suppress the regeneration of other plants.

Rhododendron ponticum has the potential to become a major pest plant in New Zealand like it is in Britain because of its ability to reproduce well both from seed and vegetatively and adapt to a range of climatic conditions.



*Top right: In flower [NZ Plant Conservation Network]
Above: Infestation near Reefton Saddle [DOC, Hokitika]*

What are the best methods of control?

With *Rhododren ponticum* plants the 'window of opportunity' prior to them reaching maturity and beginning to seed prolifically (10-12 years), should be utilised once plants are identified. This will save far more work down the track. Otherwise the choice of control method will depend on the size and age of the infestation.

Manual Methods

Seedlings can be handpulled successfully by gripping the base of the stem and then pulling at an oblique angle. Dispose of by drying then burning or sending to a lined landfill. Larger plants can be grubbed out with a mattock or grubber but take care to get all parts of the roots otherwise re-suckering will occur.

Herbicide Methods

Choose from the following methods depending on the size of your infestation and/or whether or not you wish to retain other plants. The addition a vegetable colour dye is recommended for large areas about to undergo control work to ensure no areas of infestation are missed.

- **Stump-swabbing:** Cut stems down to 5cm from ground level then immediately apply herbicide concentrate. Recommended herbicides are those containing the active ingredients, glyphosate (Roundup, Glyphosate 360 etc), metsulfuron (e.g. Escort), triclopyr & picloram (e.g. Tordon products) or use Vigilant Gel. Note that if there is bulk foliage to dispose of, chipping is a good use of material, otherwise dry and burn or send to landfill.
- **Stump-injection:** Cut into the main stem with a drill or other appropriate hand tool and apply/inject the preferred herbicide (as above) into the wounds. Make cuts every 7.5cm around the stem circumference and apply 2ml herbicide concentrate per cut. This technique is useful for dealing with plants on cliff-faces where roped access is required.
- **Spraying:** Plants to head height can be dealt with either by spraying (knapsack sprayer, handgun), OR using a weed wiper if there are other wanted plants in the vicinity. Ensure all foliage is wetted by the spray. Choose one of the recommended herbicides as above and mix to the manufacturer's specifications.

For personal safety please use all herbicides as per manufacturer's labelling

Biocontrols

There are no known biocontrol agents for *Rhododren ponticum* at present.

Where can I get more help?

For further information call either of the Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinators. They are:

Mary Trayes: Environmental Information Officer, West Coast Regional Council (768 0466 or 0508 800 118)

Tom Belton: Technical Support Officer Biosecurity & Weeds, Department of Conservation, West Coast - Tai Poutini Conservancy, Hokitika (03 756 9100)



www.weedbusters.org.nz

The West Coast Regional Council does not accept liability for any advice given on this sheet regarding application of herbicides for pest plant control. The brand names listed imply neither endorsement of those brands, nor criticism of any other brands not listed.