

Rhododendron

Species Description

Scientific name: *Rhododendron ponticum*

AKA: Rhododendron

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

Habitat: Common on acid, peaty or sandy soils in woodland, heathland, rocky hill-sides, river 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, 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 can considerably alter the structure of the habitat.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



Key ID Features



Leathery leaves with dull green upper surface



Pale underside

6-12cm



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



Seeds pods are formed after flowering

3cm

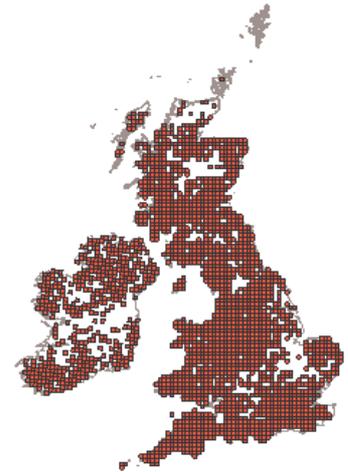
Identification throughout the year

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

Distribution

Widespread across the whole of the UK, most common in the south and west.

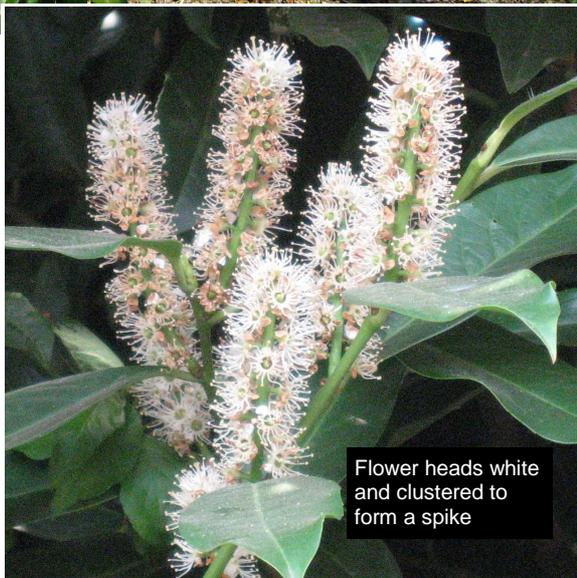
Source: NBN Gateway. Check website for current distribution



Similar Species

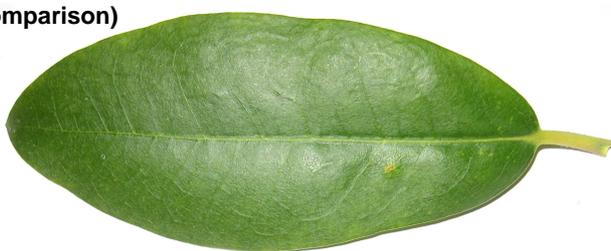
Cherry laurel
Non-native
(*Prunus laurocerasus*)

Leaves arranged alternately, ending in a single leaf



Flower heads white and clustered to form a spike

Rhododendron leaf
(for comparison)



Cherry laurel leaf

Toothed edge →



Glossy surface

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.

Examples of rhododendron varieties:



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

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