

Rhododendron

Rhododendron ponticum

Habitat: Terrestrial, likes acidic, shaded areas

Family name: Ericaceae



Rhododendron Riverside Stand

Description: Rhododendron is a large perennial evergreen, acid loving shrub which is native to the Iberian Peninsula and Asia. A dense, suckering shrub or small tree growing to 5 m tall, rarely 8 m.



Rhododendron Branches

It was introduced to Ireland during the 18th Century as an ornamental garden plant because of its attractive flowers.

There are over 900 species, but only *Rhododendron ponticum* is invasive in Ireland. Since its introduction, it has escaped into the wild and is particularly invasive in the west, north-west and south-west of the country.

Rhododendron easily naturalises and becomes a pest in some situations, often covering whole hillsides.



Rhododendron Flower



Rhododendron Petals

The flowers are 3.5 to 5 cm in diameter, violet-purple, often with small greenish-yellow spots or streaks.

It can colonise a range of habitats including agricultural land,

grasslands, woodland, urban areas, roadsides and wastelands and thrives on acidic soil in areas with mild, moist climatic conditions often in shaded areas.

The leaves are evergreen, 6-18 cm long and 2 to 5 cm wide.



Rhododendron Leaves

Rhododendron is an aggressive coloniser which is both environmentally and ecologically damaging to infected sites.

Once established, it forms dense, long-lived thickets which smother the ground flora and suppress the regeneration of native trees and shrubs



Rhododendron Flower Bud

It can reproduce by both sexual and asexual means, reproducing by vegetative means, both by suckering from roots and by layering where branches touch ground.



Rhododendron Branch



Large Rhododendron Stand

In Ireland, colonisation takes place mainly through seed dispersal. The fruit is a dry capsule 1.5 to 2.5 cm long, containing numerous small seeds.

Each flower head can produce between 3,000 and 7,000 seeds.

A single Rhododendron bush can produce over 1 million seeds per annum. Seeds are



Rhododendron Seeds

amongst the smallest and lightest of any plant species and are designed primarily for dispersal by wind.



Rhododendron Seed Pods

Seeds can be dispersed up to 100 metres by wind.



Rhododendron Stem