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
- Leaves in spiral at end of stem
- Pale underside
- Stem usually up to 15cm diameter and 5m tall
- Stems / trunk often dense and twisted
- Usually pink / purple, occasionally whiteish
- Seeds pods are formed after flowering
- 5 petals
- 3cm
- 5cm
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.

Similar Species

**Cherry laurel**
Non-native
*(Prunus laurocerasus)*

Leaves arranged alternately, ending in a single leaf

**Rhododendron leaf**
(for comparison)

Flower heads white and clustered to form a spike

**Cherry laurel leaf**

Toothed edge

Glossy surface

Distribution

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

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.

References and further reading:


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