

Safety first:

When treating *Rhododendron ponticum* using this method you need to take precautions to avoid any injury or illness.

We recommend using the following Personal Protective equipment while treating *Rhododendron ponticum* using the hatchet method as described in this leaflet.

- Safety goggles
- Face mask with appropriate filter
- Waterproof disposable gloves
- Disposable overalls
- Suitable footwear

Herbicide treatment should always be carried out by a competent operator who has received appropriate training. Please always follow any safety advice on the product packaging.

Tips and Tricks for Effective Treatment

- Adding a blue colour dye to your herbicide dilution makes it easier to keep track of what plants have been treated. This can help prevent overtreatment, wasting time and excessive herbicide use.
- Just cutting your *Rhododendron* will encourage it to regrow vigorously; this regrowth is also likely to be more multi-stemmed, making future treatment more difficult.
- A single mature plant can produce up to a million seeds; each flower head can have several thousand seeds. Removing the flowering plants first will prevent and further spread of seeds.
- The leaves of the *Rhododendron* plant have a thick waxy coating; this reduces the amount of herbicide that can be absorbed by the leaves. This makes foliar spray an inefficient, expensive and less effective treatment method. It also means there is more damage to the surrounding habitat due to herbicide run off.
- You can treat *Rhododendron* at any time of the year; results will be visible quicker if treatment is applied in spring or summer. Early summer is the best time to map *Rhododendron* on your land as the purple flowers make it easier to spot the larger plants.
- Treated plants should be left in situ for one year to die back and prevent any seed spread. After this they can be cut and mulched or burned as appropriate.



Rhododendron ponticum is an invasive species that is spreading throughout the Irish countryside.

How to identify *Rhododendron ponticum*

Grows up to 4m tall

Purple flowers in early summer

Thick waxy leaves

Woody stems



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Thanks to the SKDP MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP Project for sharing their knowledge and experience to inform this leaflet. The MacGillycuddy Reeks Project is an EIP (European Innovation Partnership) Locally Led Scheme. The Project is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Thank you to our funders the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Kerry County Council.

Kerry Biosphere is managed in partnership by



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



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Rhododendron Ponticum

MANAGEMENT FOR FARMERS, PRIVATE
LANDOWNERS AND GARDENERS



Rhododendron Ponticum – what’s the problem?

In Ireland Rhododendron ponticum is considered an Invasive Species. Invasive species are plants or animals found outside their usual range, that are harmful to the natural habitats found there. A habitat is a place where plants and animals live.

How did it get here?

Rhododendron has been found in the wild in Ireland since at least 1894. It was originally introduced from the Black sea area as an ornamental garden plant, and was often planted in estates as game cover and shelter. It thrives in humid acidic soils and is a very long lived plant often reaching over 130 years.

So how bad is it?

It is estimated that 26% of the island of Ireland is covered with land suitable for establishment and spread of Rhododendron making it a national concern.

Here are some of the negative impacts it has in our countryside:

- By reducing the light to the ground level, Rhododendron prevents other plants like our native grasses and flowers from growing. It can also shade out young trees preventing forest regeneration. This reduces the availability of natural habitats for insects, birds, small mammals and many plants species causing an overall reduction in biodiversity and land value.
- It is toxic to livestock and wildlife. If an animal grazes on Rhododendron ponticum it can become very ill and several livestock deaths have been recorded in Ireland.
- The honey created by bees feeding on its flowers is toxic to humans and can cause ‘mad honey disease’.



If you have a smaller land area, only a few plants or are treating Rhododendron ponticum in your garden, you can purchase a herbicide from your local garden centre and follow the treatment instructions below.

This can be done quickly and efficiently. It is important to plan for replanting an area once the Rhododendron has been removed. Please consider using native flowering trees or plants for this.

Go to www.pollinators.ie for more info.

Treatment Approach:

If you are treating a large area of Rhododendron the following treatment approach may be helpful in planning ahead for the work required to eradicate the plant from your land.

Step 1: Survey: The first step should be to survey your land and assess what amount of Rhododendron growth is present. This will help you to plan ahead for the treatment phase. This can be as simple as marking on your farm map where you have found Rhododendron and whether these plants are flowering or younger plants not yet flowering.

Step 2: Preliminary Clearance (Year 1): this involves the initial clearance of Rhododendron from an infested site and involves removal of all large flowering plants and any visible smaller plants. By removing all the flowering plants you are preventing any more seeds being spread.

Step 3: Advanced Clearance (Year 1-3): This is carried out to check for any plants that may have been missed and to remove them before they are large enough to begin flowering. It is best carried out early in the year before native vegetation has grown making the Rhododendron plants easier to find. Final clearance for phase 2 will be achieved when all plants aged over 5 years and older have been removed.

Step 4: Maintenance (Year 8): This requires management to remove any young plants before they grow large enough to flower and set seed. This should be carried out every 6-8 years.

Recommended Treatment method:

The recommended method of treatment is to apply a herbicide directly to the stem, just beneath the bark of the plant. This allows the herbicide to go directly into the plants transport system and reduces any impact on the surrounding vegetation and soil.

You can watch a demonstration video of this method on our YouTube channel: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=NphQzfsy1Q>

How to Treat Rhododendron on your Land

1. Map your Rhododendron



2. Treat flowering plants first



3. Wear PPE



4. Use hatchet make cut in stem close to the ground



5. Apply herbicide to cut stem



6. Recheck area over the next few years to ensure no regrowth.



- Using a hatchet, create a wound on the stem of the plant
- Make 2 wounds either side of the stem for plants less than 10cm in diameter and 3-4 wounds for larger stems.
- Wounds should be made close to the base of the plant, below the first branch growth.
- Spray herbicide solution directly onto each wound. Use approximately 25-50ml per plant depending on the size and number of stems.
- In the case of multi-stemmed plants, each stem should be treated separately.