



INVASIVE PLANT PROFILE

Cherry-laurel, English-laurel

Prunus laurocerasus

Family: Rosaceae Zone 6-8



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Why is *Prunus laurocerasus* a problem?

Originally native to southeastern Europe and Asia Minor, this shrub was introduced to North America and is now widely used as an ornamental hedge plant. It tolerates a range of light, soil and moisture conditions similar to other invasive plant species on the Pacific West Coast. It grows in sun or partial shade. It prefers moist, well-drained, acidic soil, and will tolerate salt spray. It is fast-growing, up to 30 cm per year in the right conditions. *P. laurocerasus* reproduces through seeds, which are distributed by birds. It is also known to grow new shoots from a cut stem and to sucker (grow shoots from its roots) if it is just cut. Given the right conditions, *P. laurocerasus* will also layer (grow roots from stems).

These features – highly tolerant, fast growing, easily and widely spread via birds – has allowed this plant to move into and thrive in the forest understory, forming dense cover which can shade out other native plants. It is typically found in parks or natural areas that are adjacent to residential areas – this plant escapes private garden settings. Invasive plant assessments conducted in the Still Creek watershed and in the City of North Vancouver have identified *P. laurocerasus* as an invasive plant problem. It has also been found in Boundary Bay Regional Park. It is considered to be at the early stages of invasion and not yet prolific in Lower Mainland forests. It is therefore a good target for 'early detection and rapid response' strategies.

Early detection and rapid response refers to the process of confirming a plant's invasive potential in a new area, watershed or municipality, then proceeding with management responses that focus on eradication. Field practices have found that addressing a plant species in the beginning stages of invasion is more cost effective and success more likely than attempting to control a plant that is well established.

See www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=50021 for more information on *P. laurocerasus*.

How is *Prunus laurocerasus* controlled once a site is invaded?

This plant can be controlled through hand removal or by preventing it from fruiting.

- Hand-pull small seedlings. Due to this plant's extensive root system, hand-pulling of anything larger than a small seedling causes too much soil disturbance.
- Clip plant before it flowers, or remove all the spent flowers before they can form fruit

Note that removing flowers can be difficult if there are a number of shrubs, or if the plant has grown to 6 meters. The berries, the leaves and the bark are all poisonous. Wash well after handling it, remove cuttings, and make sure the berries are not eaten by children.

***P. laurocerasus* has been identified as an invasive plant in Washington and Oregon by the US National Park Service, Plant Conservation Alliance.**



Plant description

Prunus laurocerasus is an evergreen shrub that grows 3-6m, with wide spreading, dense, coarse-textured foliage. Leaves are alternate, oblong, range from slightly to fully serrated, and are between 5 – 15 cm long. The leaves range from medium to dark green. White, fragrant flowers 5 – 10 cm long bloom in clusters in mid spring. The plant produces berries in the summer, which are purple to black and poisonous to humans.

Market Alternatives

There are other shrubs that offer similar benefits to *P. laurocerasus* such as providing a continuous hedge or screen, without becoming invasive and a threat to local ecosystems.

- 1 Salal *Gaultheria shallon*** This native evergreen shrub is one of the most common species found growing in the Pacific Northwest. Large glossy emerald green leaves are the dominant feature with small white bell-like flowers in spring followed by many edible dark blue berries. Suggested for informal hedges, screens, woodland gardens, as a foundation plant, or background plant in native plant restoration. It requires humus-rich acid soil.

NATIVE SPECIES, PART SHADE/SHADE, DRY/MOIST, 1-3M TALL AND WIDE



- 2 Mexican mock orange *Choisya ternata*** A tall evergreen shrub with light green whorled foliage. Fragrant white flowers bloom in spring. This common shrub is a good choice for a low maintenance wide hedge and should only be hand pruned not sheared. Suggested for foundation plantings, as a background shrub, for woodland gardens, mass planting in large commercial sites, and as a specimen.

SUN/PART SHADE, MOIST, 2.5-3M TALL AND WIDE



- 3 Evergreen huckleberry *Vaccinium ovatum*** This slow growing evergreen shrub has tiny green foliage that can turn a bronze in winter. Small white bell-like flowers in spring are followed by black-blue edible berries. As a native it has high ornamental value in any planting. Suggested for a low hedge, foundation planting, woodland garden, background plant and specimen and prefers acidic soil.

NATIVE SPECIES, SUN/PART SHADE, MOIST, 1.5M – 2M TALL X 1-2M WIDE



- 4 Strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo*** A tall evergreen shrub or small tree. It produces orange berries that resemble strawberries. As an evergreen this plant will provide winter interest and is also used as a hedge or a specimen. Suitable for residential gardens or commercial plantings

SUN, DRY, 4.5M TALL X 2-3M WIDE, SMALLER CULTIVARS AVAILABLE



- 5 Anglojapanese Yew *Taxus x media*** This emerald green conifer is a very popular choice for hedges. It has tiny needles with red berries and a very compact form. A good alternative for laurel because it grows more slowly. There are a few very good cultivars to choose from. All parts of this plant are poisonous if ingested.

SUN/PART SHADE, MOIST, 3-3.5M TALL X 1-2M WIDE



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