

Cherry laurel

Rosaceae - *Prunus laurocerasus*



What does it look like?

Cherry laurel is an evergreen shrub or tree, which grows up to 10m tall, however on rare occasions it has been documented to grow as high as 18m. It often has multiple short trunks up to 60cm broad. Its leaves are dark green, thick, leathery, and narrowly oval to lance-shaped. Leaves are around 75-180 mm long, and 23-55 mm wide, with slightly serrated and curved-under edges and pointed tips. The leaves have shiny, smooth, dark green upper surfaces with obvious pale veins, paler and less shiny undersides, and short stalks (1 cm long). Leaves occur alternately, on short, thick stalks, and have hairs near the base.

The trees flower August to September, and fruit from November to January. The flowers are small (2-5mm), and grow in bunches of 20-30, at the ends of 8-12cm long spikes. Each flower has five petals, which are greenish white to cream in colour, and round and spreading in shape. The fruit are about 10mm long, ovoid, and occur in grape-like clusters, and look like dark purple to black cherries. It is different to other cherries because it is evergreen, and the flowers are on long spikes instead of small clusters. The leaves have short, distantly placed teeth towards the tip, which also separates it from other cherry trees.

Why is it a problem?

Cherry laurel is a large species which creates dense, long-lived thickets, it seeds freely and is poisonous. The seed is bird-dispersed, as they eat its fruit. It can also spread by sprouting from the root system. It can form dense stands in open and disturbed habitats preventing the regeneration of native species. It is likely to invade habitats such as riverine forest, disturbed forest and shrubland, alluvial terraces, plantations, shelterbelts, roadsides, wastelands. It is terrestrial, and prefers high rainfall or otherwise saturated soils. It is commonly found in lowland areas, plantations, and around shelterbelts, roadsides, and wastelands. It is also commonly found where it has been deliberately cultivated in the past, especially around old homesteads, domains and parks.

Control methods

Physical Control

- Seedlings and small plants can be dug out all year round, and mulched or disposed of at a reuse transfer station.

Herbicide control

- For larger trees, a 'stump swab' can be used- metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (5g/L) or a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (100ml/L).
- Bore: drill 1 downward angled hole every 5 cm around the trunk, 2 ml per hole of metsulfuron methyl 600g/kg (20g/L) or 10ml a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (undiluted).
- Frill: make a deep cut into the sapwood at 5 cm intervals around the base of the tree with a sharp chisel or axe, taking care not to ring-bark the plant. Immediately saturate the cuts with metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (20g/L) or undiluted a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L.
- Spray: can only be used in summer. To do this, spray with metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (5g/10L) or a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (6ml/L).

CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

After controlling, it is best to monitor the site for any regrowth and seedlings for two years. If possible, search for and eliminate the source of the infestation. Where appropriate, plant local native trees or shrubs to produce shade.

Management programme

- Organisms of interest

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<https://eservices.es.govt.nz/online-services/new/BiosecurityRFS/step/1?Subject=PlantPests&Species=205>