

Spindle tree

Celastraceae - *Euonymus europaeus*



What does it look like?

Spindle trees are a deciduous shrub or small tree to 6m tall with smooth, grey bark and young branches that are square, green and smooth. Paired oval leaves (2-10 cm) with pointed tips, margins with shallow rounded teeth, and 6-12mm leaf stalks usually turn red in autumn. Flower buds are greenish and usually 4-angled. Clusters of 2-15 flowers (8-10 mm diameter) with four narrow and widely separated greenish-yellow petals appear from November and December, followed (March to May) by 4-lobed, deep pink seed capsules that ripen to expose bright orange flesh covering each seed.

Also known as English spindleberry, European spindle tree, Common spindle

Why is it a problem?

Spindle trees can tolerate a wide range of conditions including shade, warm and cold temperatures, wind, poor soils and moderate to low rainfall. It is poisonous so is not grazed by stock. It will form dense thickets on open spaces, blocking and shading other plants. Produces many seeds which germinate freely and are spread widely by birds, and sprouts (suckers) from its root system.

Control methods

Physical Control

- Hand pull small plants and seedlings (all year round). Mulch plant material after.

Chemical Control

- Cut and paint stump (all year round): cut stems near ground level and paint stumps with metsulfuron methyl 600g/kg (5 g/L) or a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (100ml/L) or triclopyr 600EC (100ml/L) or glyphosate (200ml/L).
- Overall spray (all year round): triclopyr 600EC (60ml/10L + penetrant) or metsulfuron methyl 600g/kg (5g/10L + penetrant).

Monitor the site for a least a year and treat any regrowth or seedlings (seeds survive more than 1 year in soil). Where appropriate plant a local native shrub or tree.

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

Plants with seed must be buried deeply, burnt, or disposed of at a refuse transfer station.

Follow up at six-monthly intervals to complete eradication.

More information

The fruit of *Euonymus europaeus* is poisonous, containing, amongst other substances, the alkaloids theobromine and caffeine, as well as an extremely bitter terpene. Poisonings are more common in young children, who are enticed by the brightly coloured fruits. Ingestion can result in liver and kidney damage and even death.

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<https://eservices.es.govt.nz/online-services/new/BiosecurityRFS/step/1?Subject=PlantPests&Species=213>

Management programme

- Organisms of interest