

Toxic Invasive Plants in the Comox Valley



photo: A. Millham



photo: L. Scott



photo: C. Richman

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

A very tall (2-6 m) plant with leaves as much as 1.5 m across. The leaves have stiff hairs on the underside and are compound and deeply cut. Stems are hollow with dark red-purple blotches. White umbrella-like flowers flower in late summer.

Reason for Concern

Severe human health hazard: Sap from the stalks and stem can cause severe burns. Scarring and blindness may result.

Control

Caution: It is best to let a professional remove this plant for you. If you are going to remove the plant yourself:

- Always wear goggles, waterproof gloves and clothing; cover exposed skin.
- Always bag seed heads, seal tightly and put in regular waste stream; transport rest of plant in plastic bags to the landfill or pile on site to dry out (will no longer be toxic once dry) – never compost.
- Thoroughly wash all equipment that has come into contact with the plant.



photo: District of Saanich

Tansy Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)

Biennial to short-lived perennial plant in the Sunflower family up to 1.2 m tall. The dark green leaves are deeply cut into irregular segments giving the plant a “ragged” appearance. The daisy-like bright yellow flowers are evident from July through September.

Reason for Concern

A poisonous plant to animals (especially cattle, horses and goats), causing liver dysfunction, photo-sensitivity and sometimes death. Flowers of tansy ragwort contain the highest percentage of the toxin. Trace amounts of the toxin can have cumulative effects on both animals and humans if long term exposure occurs.

Control

- Hand-pull isolated plants and small patches and remove as much of the root as possible.
- Mow/cut prior to flowering or seed set.



photo: L. Scott

English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Evergreen shrub or small tree (7 to 10 m tall) with dark red berries and dark green evergreen foliage.

Reason for Concern

Berries are toxic to people if ingested.

Control

- Cut mature trees at ground level, being sure to remove all plant material including berries which contain seeds.
- Monitor cut stumps for regrowth.



photo: D. Polster



photo: C. Richman



photo: R. Mueller



photo: A. Millham

Spurge Laurel (*Daphne laureola*)

An evergreen shrub, shade-tolerant and reminiscent of rhododendron, 0.5 – 1.8 m tall. Leaves are very dark green, shiny, smooth and thick. The twigs are stout and have a strong odour when cut. Small yellow flowers develop into red then purple-black berries.

Reason for Concern

The berries, leaves and bark are poisonous to humans, cats and dogs and handling the plant can cause dermatitis.

Control

Caution: wear gloves and other protective clothing when cutting or handling as the sap, fruit and leaves contain irritating toxins, which may be volatile.

- Hand-pull seedlings and young plants, or pull with a weed wrench or similar tool to remove the entire root.
- Cut older plants below the soil line.



photo: D. Hanna

Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)

This aromatic plant, with button-shaped yellow flowers and coarse, fern-like leaves are alternate and deeply divided. Grows up to 1.5 m tall and is common in the region.

Reason for Concern

Caution: The leaves and flowers are toxic if consumed in large quantities by humans or livestock, but can be grazed safely by sheep and goats. The volatile oil contains toxic compounds and can cause convulsions as well as liver and brain damage.

Control

- Wear gloves and other protective clothing if hand pulling to prevent skin irritation or other illness.
- Mow sites very low to the ground before July to prevent seed production.
- Hand-pull and dig the roots out to effectively control infestations.



photo: L. Scott

Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)

Has distinctive ‘iris-look’ with bright yellow flowers. Leaves narrow, sword shaped and dark green with prominent mid-rib. Perennial plant that is found in wet areas. When not in flower, you can tell it apart from native cattail by its leaves. Yellow iris leaves will be arranged in a flat fan-like shape, with a pronounced center vein.

Reason for Concern

Toxic if ingested by livestock and humans; causes dermatitis in sensitive humans.

Control

- Dig up small populations manually and remove all of root mass.
- For large populations, clip seed heads to prevent further spread. Cutting plants close to the ground several times a year has been effective if roots cannot be dug out.



photo: R. Mueller