KING COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL PROGRAM WEED ALERT

Bittersweet Nightshade

Solanum dulcamara Nightshade Family

Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Slender perennial vine or semi-woody shrub
- Leaves are dark green to purple
- Star-shaped purple or blue flowers; stamens fused in a prominent yellow cone
- Flowers grow in clusters along branches
- Berries are round or egg-shaped
- Unripe berries are green, then orange; ripe berries are bright red
- All stages of berries can be found on same plant
- Crushed leaves and bark have an unpleasant smell

Biology

- Flowers mid-May to September
- Reproduces by abundant seed production and vegetatively from stem and root fragments
- Plants may grow in dense patches or individually
- Branches grow and die back 3 to 6 feet or more each year; known to climb 30 feet or higher into trees

Impacts

- Toxic to people, pets and livestock
- Outcompetes native species such as salmonberry, redtwig dogwood and willows
- Can take over small streams causing channel disruption

Distribution

- Found throughout King County, especially in creeks and wetlands, but also common along edges of fields, yards/gardens, roadsides and parks
- Can grow in a wide range of conditions, from relatively dry to flooded soils and from full sun to medium shade

Cornell University

All parts of this plant, even ripe berries, are poisonous. Severe cases can result in paralysis and even death.

Bittersweet nightshade is commonly found mixed in with other weeds, but also outcompetes native plants.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program Line: **206-296-0290**
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

King County

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling bittersweet nightshade in Washington state, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes that this plant is invasive and is collecting information and providing education on control. The Board encourages and recommends control of existing populations especially for revegetation or restoration projects.

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons. When working in critical areas such as wetlands, care must be taken to minimize soil disturbance; any disturbed area must be stabilized to control erosion and sediment deposition. Refer to the King County Surface Water Design Manual for further information (call 206-296-6519). It is advised to always wear gloves when handling bittersweet nightshade.

Manual: Hand pull the stems that are close to the ground and pull or dig up roots, taking care not to break them apart. Even a small root or stem fragment left behind can re-sprout. For larger, more mature stands, dig out with a shovel or spade. Hand pulling and clearing invasive vegetation with the use of hand tools of up to 7,000 square feet annually is allowable without a permit in unincorporated King County; for incorporated areas, check with your local land use agency for any limits or permits needed.

Riparian and Aquatic Area Control Issues

* Focus on manual removal for small infestations.
* When manual removal is used along creeks and ditches, prevent or mitigate for erosion and turbidity problems.
* When using herbicides, choose an aquatic formulation and apply it with a wick wiper, spot spray using low pressure or use the cut stem/wipe method.

Mechanical: Mowing is not usually practical due to habitat and growth pattern of bittersweet nightshade, although brush cutting may facilitate access to roots for manual removal if the plants are growing in dense thickets. Also, consider cutting plants to the ground and then covering with a heavy duty geotextile fabric securely fastened for at least two years; cut any escaping plants to the ground and re-cover.

Chemical: Herbicides can be effective on bittersweet nightshade, especially if combined with manual control and monitoring for surviving plants. **Choose a formulation that is appropriate for the site: either aquatic or terrestrial. Follow the label exactly as written and only use at the rate that is prescribed on the label.** Products containing glyphosate are effective when applied after berries have formed or in the early summer after the plants have fully leafed out, but before flowering. Glyphosate is absorbed by the growing leaves (not woody stems). However, glyphosate is "non-selective" and will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with. Products with the active ingredient imazapyr are also effective; they are absorbed through leaves *and* woody stems. Apply when plants are actively growing, usually during early to mid-summer is the best time. Like glyphosate, this herbicide is non-selective. To minimize off-target damage, spot spray or wipe on leaves and stems. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredient triclopyr work well for lawn areas as they won't harm most grasses. Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. For questions about herbicide use, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.

King County
Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Water and Land Resources Division
Noxious Weed Control Program
206-296-0290 TTY Relay: 711

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