

Bittersweet Nightshade

Solanum dulcamara Nightshade Family

Identification Tips

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

Biology

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

Impacts

Toxic to people, pets, and livestock. Outcompetes native species such as salmonberry, red twig 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. Introduced from Europe, probably for ornamental use.

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement to control bittersweet nightshade in Washington, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes that this plant is invasive and encourages control of existing populations, especially in connection with 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, take care to minimize soil disturbance. Any disturbed area must be stabilized to control erosion and sediment deposition. Check your local permitting rules before removing plants from shorelines or wetlands. Always wear gloves when handling bittersweet nightshade.

**Weed of Concern:
Control Recommended**



This toxic perennial can grow in a wide range of conditions and is found throughout King County.



Flowers are purple and star-shaped, with their stamens fused into a yellow cone.



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

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program: **206-477-WEED** kingcounty.gov/weeds

Manual:

Hand-pull 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 resprout. For larger, more mature stands, dig out with a shovel or spade. Established plants have very large root systems; manual control may not be practical and may cause significant soil disturbance.

Mechanical:

Mowing is not usually practical due to the habitat and growth pattern of bittersweet nightshade. However, if the plants are growing in dense thickets, brush cutting may facilitate access to roots for manual removal. Also consider cutting plants to the ground and then covering with a heavy duty geotextile fabric. Keep securely fastened for at least 2 years. Then cut any surviving plants to the ground and recover.

Chemical:

Follow all applicable laws and regulations for your location. Choose a formulation appropriate for the site: either aquatic or terrestrial. Follow the label exactly as written and only use at the specified rate.

For large, established populations chemical control may be the most feasible method and cause least soil disturbance. Products containing glyphosate are effective when applied in early summer after plants have fully leafed out but before flowering, or after berries have formed in fall. Glyphosate is absorbed by growing leaves (not woody stems). Products with the active ingredient imazapyr are also effective. This chemical is absorbed through leaves *and* woody stems. Apply when plants are actively growing; early-mid summer is usually the best time. Both chemicals will injure all plants sprayed. To minimize off-target damage, spot spray or wipe on leaves and stems. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredient triclopyr work well for grassy areas as they won't harm most grasses. Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial, and government agency users. For more information, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.



Grows in a wide range of conditions, from dry to wet soils and full sun to moderate shade.



Larger, more mature infestations can be challenging to dig up with a shovel or spade.



- Focus on manual removal for small infestations
- When manual removal is used along creeks and ditches, prevent or mitigate 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
- State and local permits may be required



Take care not to leave behind any stem or root fragments, as they can resprout.