



Severe skin irritation from Spurge Laurel (*Daphne laureola*)

What is Spurge Laurel, and where is it found?

Spurge Laurel (scientific name: *Daphne laureola*), also known as Daphne Laurel, is an evergreen shrub that thrives on the shady forest floor throughout south Vancouver Island; it may also be present in other areas of southwest British Columbia. It is not native to B.C. and was originally imported from Southern Europe, North Africa, or West Asia. These plants are commonly sold in nurseries and are popular due to their attractive foliage and fragrant tubular, yellow flowers. The flowers appear in the early spring, followed by small, black berries. However, most of the year, no flowers or berries may be visible. Spurge Laurel can grow to one metre in height and usually forms large clumps.



Spurge Laurel

Which parts of the plant are poisonous?

The toxins are concentrated in the bark, sap, and berries. Spurge Laurel is listed as a poisonous plant with the Canadian Poisonous Plants Information System.

What happens if I touch or accidentally eat parts of the plant?

You can be poisoned through skin contact with the sap or by eating the berries. Symptoms include a burning in the mouth and swelling of the tongue and lips (if the berries are eaten), followed by thirst, difficulty swallowing, nausea, vomiting, bloody diarrhea, weakness, and coma. A child died in Nova Scotia after eating the berries. Severe skin irritation and blistering can occur on contact with the leaves or sap (these symptoms usually disappear after a couple of days).



Spurge Laurel leaves and berry (black)

How can I protect myself?

Wear gloves when handling the plants. Remember to dispose of the gloves after use, or launder them to prevent a buildup of irritant sap.

Wear coveralls or clothing that leaves no skin exposed, when in contact with the plants (e.g., when brushing against the plants). Launder the clothing after use.

Wear goggles when disturbing or removing the plants, as small droplets of sap may be released into the air.

Use caution when transporting plants, plant cuttings, or waste containing the plants, as airborne sap droplets may cause eye and throat irritation.



Spurge Laurel “bush” growing under a tree

How do I apply first aid?

After skin contact with sap, flush with copious amounts of water. If a persistent rash develops, consult a physician. Application of an anti-inflammatory cream (e.g., antihistamine cream, or a 0.5% hydrocortisone cream) may reduce skin irritation. These creams are available in most pharmacy stores.

If the sap gets into the eyes, flush with copious amounts of water and consult a physician.

If sap gets into the mouth, flush with copious amounts of water and consult a physician (drinking milk or eating ice cream may relieve symptoms). If eaten, induce vomiting and consult a physician.



Wear coveralls and gloves (and goggles) when handling the plants.

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