



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

www.mass.gov/nhesp

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Great Laurel *Rhododendron maximum* L.

State Status: **Threatened**

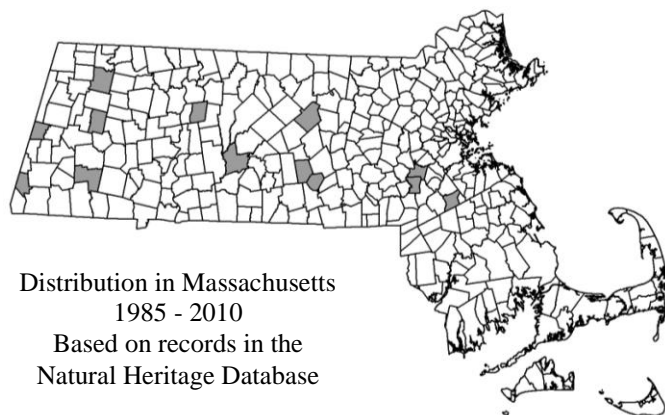
Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: Great Laurel, a member of the Heath family (Ericaceae), is an evergreen shrub or small tree that grows up to 10 m (33 ft.) high. Its 1-2 dm (3-8 in.) long leaves are smooth-margined, alternate, leathery, and, usually, widest above the middle. In addition, the leaves are dark green above and paler green and pubescent (hairy) beneath. The young branchlets are pubescent, as well. Great Laurel's pink to white flowers are on sticky pedicels (flower stalks) and clustered in dome-shaped, terminal inflorescences. Each 3.5-4 cm (~1.5 in.) long flower is subtended by a short, five-lobed calyx (outermost floral whorl) and is spotted with yellow or orange on its inner surface. The fruit is a 10-15 mm long, five-chambered, septicidal capsule (a dry fruit derived from a compound pistil that opens along the walls or "septa" dividing the various ovaries). Great Laurel does best in filtered light and flowers from late June to late July.



Great Laurel in flower showing large evergreen leaves. Photo: Jennifer Garrett, NHESP.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Great Laurel could be confused with Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*). In contrast to Great Laurel, however, Mountain Laurel has flowers that are marked with purple. Furthermore, its hairless leaves are shorter, only 5-8 cm (2 - ~3 in.) compared to the 10-20 cm (4-8 in.) of Great Laurel.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1985 - 2010
Based on records in the
Natural Heritage Database

HABITAT: Great Laurel is a plant of moist woods, swamps, and the edges of ponds. Its habitats in Massachusetts include the edge of a boggy swamp; an Atlantic White Cedar swamp, near an open pond; a forested seepage fen (a peat-forming area where very cold, nutrient-poor water seeps to the surface); and the edge of a Red Maple swamp. Among the plant species associated with Great Laurel are Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), and Interrupted, Cinnamon and Royal Ferns (*Osmunda claytoniana*, *O. cinnamomea* and *O. regalis*). Associated, uncommon Massachusetts plants include Swamp Red Currant (*Ribes triste*).

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; www.mass.gov/dfw

Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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RANGE: The range of Great Laurel has been documented as extending from Nova Scotia to southern Ontario and Ohio, south to Georgia and Alabama. It is widespread in the southern US and Appalachian Mountains, but in New England it is approaching the northern limit of its range; it is also listed as rare in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine. NatureServe ranks Great Laurel as G5, Globally Secure.

POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS:

Great Laurel is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Threatened. All listed species are protected from killing, collecting, possessing, or sale and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. It is currently known from Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, Worcester, Norfolk, and Middlesex Counties and is historically known from Hampden County.

MANAGEMENT AND THREATS: At several Great Laurel sites, non-native invasive species including Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) are present. Sites should be monitored for invasions of exotic plants; if exotic plants are crowding and out-competing this species, a plan should be developed, in consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, to remove the invaders.

In cases where dense overstory has grown and appears to be causing declines in the population, management to open the canopy to prevent shading of concentrated populations may be considered again, a plan should be developed in consultation with NHESP. Other threats include, especially in the past, collecting for home landscaping. The prohibition of take under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act currently limits collection.

All active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) is subject to review under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, and should be planned in close consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

Flowers Present

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

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