

Stop

The Invasion



Photograph courtesy of Washington State University Beachwatchers

Marine Clam

Nuttallia obscurata

Report Sightings

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invasivespecies.wa.gov

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Photograph courtesy of Claudia Mills, University of Washington Friday Harbor Laboratories

What is it?

Nuttallia obscurata, commonly known as the purple varnish, varnish, or mahogany clam was first introduced to the United States and Washington from ship ballast water from Asia. It is freshwater tolerant and is most abundant in areas where there is freshwater runoff.

Is it here yet?

Yes. The purple varnish clam has been reported in northern Puget Sound for about 10 years. Dense colonies can be found on the San Juan Islands in densities exceeding 800 per square meter.

Why should I care?

The purple varnish clam grows prolifically forming dense quantities very rapidly, displacing other native species. These marine clams have displaced native clams from their former ranges. It also can pose a human health risk because they have higher toxin levels.

What should I do if I find one?

Report online at www.invasivespecies.wa.gov/report.shtml.

How can we stop it?

To prevent spread, clean, drain, and dry your equipment after each use. The purple varnish clam is regulated by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, meaning that these species are considered to have some beneficial use along with a moderate, but manageable risk of becoming an invasive species, and may not be released into state waters, except as provided in Revised Code of Washington 77.16.253.



Photograph courtesy of Linda Schroeder, U.S. Geological Survey

What are its characteristics?

- Purple varnish clams grow to less than 3 inches in length.
- The purple varnish clam, derives its name from the shiny brown coating on the outer surface of the shell.
- They have two, long, thin siphons and a large foot that are translucent white and can be fully retracted.
- The interior surface of the shell is usually a uniform shade of purple. Occasionally small specimens will have purple coloring showing on the outer surface.
- The varnish clam is nearly oval shaped, with the posterior end slightly longer and more angular. The shell is relatively flat, with a large external hinge ligament.
- The clam has a large foot and long unfused siphons, indicative of a burrowing species able to live deep in the substrate.

Where do I get more information?

- Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership:
http://pugetsoundnearshore.org/technical_papers/shellfish.pdf
- University of Washington Independent Scientist:
<http://faculty.washington.edu/cemills/Nuttallia.html>
- U.S. Geological Survey:
<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?SpeciesID=2259>
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife:
http://wdfw.wa.gov/ais/species.php?Name=nuttalia_obscurata

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