

Leafy Spurge

Euphorbia escula



Image © John M. Randall/The Nature Conservancy

DESCRIPTION

Leafy spurge is an upright, branching, perennial herb two-three feet tall. It has alternate narrow leaves, somewhat frosted and slightly wavy along the margins. The flowers of this weed are very small and are borne in greenish-yellow structures surrounded by yellow distinctive heart-shaped bracts.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Seedlings appear deep red or purplish
- yellowish-green bracts
- patches of yellow from a distance

WHEN TO FIND LEAFY SPURGE:

Look after May, when the bracts turn yellowish-green, making them easier to identify.

WHERE TO FIND LEAFY SPURGE:

It is capable of invading disturbed sites, including stream banks, prairies, savannas, pastures, abandoned fields and roadside areas.

WHAT TO DO

Pulling Leafy Spurge can stimulate additional growth. Please only report this plant.

CAUTION

Leafy spurge contains an acrid latex sap which may cause a rash when the sap on the skin is exposed to sunlight, and can cause permanent blindness if rubbed on the eye.

Leafy Spurge is an aggressive and persistent weed that spreads extremely rapidly. Unless detected early, this plant is nearly impossible to control due to a very deep and extensive root systems. It is tolerant of a wide range of habitats and may occur in rich damp soils (such as stream banks) or on extremely nutrient poor, dry soils.

First introduced into eastern North America from Russia in the early 1800s (probably as contaminants in seed grain), this plant now covers more than 2.7 million acres, mostly in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming. In Oregon, it is primarily in the East and Southwest, including Jackson County.

Leafy spurge is one of the first plants to emerge in the spring (April). The first seedling shoot produced usually does not survive, rather it is replaced by its adventitious shoot that will mature into the flowering shoot. Fruits ripen and seeds are dispersed from mid- to late-July. Seed are dispersed by the explosive seed capsule and along streams.

Prescribed burning in conjunction with herbicide application can provide excellent control of leafy spurge in open areas. Treatments are necessary over at least a 5-10 year period.

REFERENCE

Biesboer, D., update by Nancy Eckardt (1996) Element Stewardship abstract for Dalmation toadflax. The Nature Conservancy. Available on line at:
<http://tncweedsucdavis.edu/>



Images courtesy of Dan Sharratt, Oregon Department of Agriculture



A young shoot.
Image by William M. Ciesla,

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