

Leafy Spurge

Invasive Plant Fact Sheet

DESCRIPTION

Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*) an erect, deep-rooted, branching perennial that can grow from 1 to 2 feet tall. It frequently grows in dense colonies from horizontal roots.

The plant blooms with small yellow flowers. The leaves and flowers alternate along the stem.

Seed capsules explode, dispersing seed up to 15 feet, even further with the help of wind or water. The root system is complex, allowing the tiniest of root rhizome to quickly spread.

WHY IS IT BAD?

Leafy spurge is an aggressive invasive weed that chokes out native plants, poisons livestock, and causes painful skin and eye irritations.

Crowding: They spread fast using deep, creeping roots and seeds, forming thick single-species areas that destroy native plants and local wildlife habitats.

Chemical blocking: Their roots release natural chemicals that stop other helpful plants from growing nearby.

Hard to remove: Their massive underground roots go very deep and can re-grow from tiny pieces, making standard pulling or mowing mostly useless.

Toxic sap: The stems and leaves contain a white, milky juice that causes severe skin rashes, blisters, and severe irritation if it gets into eyes or the mouth.

Harms animals: The plant is poisonous to horses, cattle, and other grazing animals, causing severe digestive illness or mouth blisters that ruin pastures and farm hay.



DISTRIBUTION & SPREAD

Large infestations give the landscape a yellowish tinge due to the yellow bracts. Leafy spurge invades pastures and other open areas. Spreading quickly, it can absorb a great deal of water and nutrients from the soil. It is a major pest of national parks and nature preserves in the western United States. It can completely overtake large areas of land and displace native vegetation.



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CONTROL METHODS

Manual Removal: Hand-pulling/Digging: Effective only for small, new patches in loose or damp soil. You must remove the entire root system, or the plant will resprout from hidden buds.

Always wear protective gloves and long sleeves, as the sap causes severe skin irritation.

Mowing: To reduce the likelihood of the spurge spreading from seed you can mow every two to three weeks between Spring and mid-summer. This may exhaust root reserves, but it will not kill the stand.

Smothering: Cover dense patches with heavy mulch for at least one full growing season. The mulch can be covered with black or clear plastic sheeting which should be reused or discarded after a successful suppression. Weed barriers that are left in place will break down over time, fail to suppress weeds, and pollute your soil.

Chemical: *Carefully read the label;* the label is the law.

Use of systemic herbicides may be effective when applied following the product label. Apply only on calm, dry days after flowers fade/late in the season for best efficacy. Consult a professional pesticide applicator for advice or management.

Surveillance: Re-visit treated areas three times per season for at least five years to manage resprouts and emerging seedlings. Heavily infested areas may need to be monitored for up to a decade.

PLANT DISPOSAL

Dispose of plant materials carefully. Seeds and live plant materials may be viable (meaning they could survive in municipal compost and spread). Dispose of viable material in sealed garbage bags in your municipal trash bin. Do NOT dispose of them with compost.

Keep Medford Beautiful is a community effort initiated by Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn to organize local volunteers to help clean up and beautify the city's streets and public spaces.



Learn more about the work we're doing and ways to get involved at www.medfordma.org/KMB or scan the QR code.



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