

Leafy Spurge
Euphorbia esula

Currently in Montana, noxious weeds infest about 7.6 million acres (Montana's Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2008). Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction, 32 non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state noxious weed list.

Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) is a Priority 2B listed noxious weed in the state of Montana. Priority 2B species are noxious weeds that are abundant in Montana and widespread in many counties. Management criteria for these species includes eradication or containment where these species are less abundant. Management for these species shall be prioritized by local weed districts. Species listed as Priority 2B noxious weeds are: Canada thistle, field bindweed, leafy spurge, whitetop, Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, dalmation toadflax, St. Johnswort, sulfur cinquefoil, common tansy, oxeye daisy, houndstongue, yellow toadflax, and saltcedar.

Leafy spurge is native to Eurasia and was accidentally introduced into the United States as a contaminant in crop seed. Leafy spurge tends to inhabit roadsides, ATV trails, overgrazed pastures, gravel pits, housing developments, lake shore properties and any other area where there has been a disturbance in the soil. Leafy spurge does not grow well in areas where there is a lot of shade; it is more suited to survive in dry, open environments.

Leafy spurge is a herbaceous perennial plant with smooth, hairless or sometimes slightly hairy stems. The leaves of leafy spurge are small and lanceolate with a slightly wavy margin. Flowers are produced in umbels with a basal pair of bright yellow-green petal like bracts. Bracts appear in late spring, while flowers do not develop until early summer. Every part of the leafy spurge plant contains a toxic white milky sap. The plant is toxic to horses, cattle and humans.

Leafy spurge can be difficult to control because lateral underground roots can expand up to 15 feet a crossed and can reach up to 24 feet in depth. The root system has the capability to have numerous buds from which new plants can grow. Another way that leafy spurge reproduces is through seed. A single leafy spurge plant can produce 100-200 seeds, seeds are tan/gray in color and can remain viable in the soil for up to 10 years. When the capsule that contains the leafy spurge seeds is dry, the capsule breaks open and the seeds are expelled with tremendous force, up to 15 feet away from the parent plant.

Leafy spurge can be controlled by various integrated weed management techniques such as herbicides, biological control and grazing by sheep and goats. Often control measures are most successful by using a combination of control methods. Please take a few moments to learn about leafy spurge and each of the other state listed noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-3144.