

## War on Weeds — Weeds are Everybody's Problem

### THE ISSUE: Leafy spurge

Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) is a creeping perennial native to Eurasia. It was most likely introduced into the U.S. as a contaminant in seed. It invades rangelands, roadsides, pastures and riparian areas. When leaves and stems are broken, they exude a white latex that can cause severe skin irritation. Leafy spurge is toxic to horses and cattle.

One of the most impressive characteristics of leafy spurge is its root system. It can reach up to 15 feet deep making it very difficult to control. It is a prolific seed producer, but it also reproduces by rhizomes and root buds. Stems typically grow 1-3 feet tall and are topped with yellow umbel shaped flowers (looks like an upside-down umbrella). Leaves have smooth margins, are lance shaped, and are bluish green in color.

Leaves can be 1/4–1/2 inch wide by 1–4 inches long.

Seed capsules explode when mature, launching the seeds up to 15 feet. For control methods to be successful they must target the root system.



Photo courtesy of Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org

### Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Options:

- Prevention — Learn to identify this plant. Never transport unknown plant material. Make sure to clean equipment and clothing when leaving infested areas.
- Mechanical — Because leafy spurge can reproduce vegetatively, mechanical forms of control are not effective unless done on a regular basis. In most cases, mechanical treatments are not realistic and will cause the weed to spread even more.
- Cultural — Plant competitive beneficial vegetation. Use management practices that will benefit desirable vegetation. Cattle and horses will not graze leafy spurge, but sheep and goats may.
- Chemical — There are several herbicide active ingredients available for use on leafy spurge. For more information visit <https://pnwhandbooks.org/weed> then search “spurge, leafy”. **Always read and follow herbicide label directions!**

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