

Leafy Spurge

Euphorbia esula

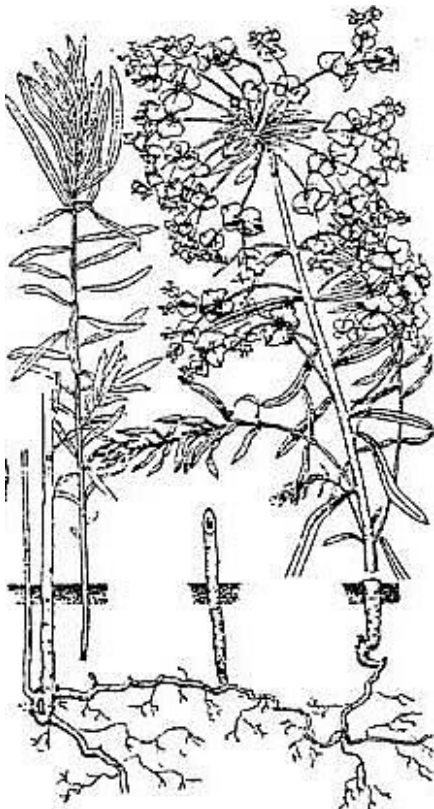
Description:

Introduced to North America as an ornamental plant, this long-lived perennial plant reproduces primarily by re-sprouting from its extensive, persistent, creeping root system, but also by seed. It grows on a range of soil types and tolerates very dry to very wet climates. All parts of the plant contain milky latex that can cause irritation, blisters and swelling, and is poisonous to some livestock. It forms dense stands over time and a large plant can produce up to 130,000 seeds. Commonly confused with Cypress spurge, Leafy spurge is taller, has longer leaves, and less branching in the upper part of the plant.

Stems are thickly clustered, smooth and hairless, growing up to 1 m tall.

Leaves are numerous and attached directly to the stem, arranged alternately or sometimes spirally. The leaves are narrow with smooth edges and up to 7 cm long.

Flowers are small, yellowish-green, lack both petals and sepals, supported by 2 green, heart-shaped, leaf-like bracts and are arranged in numerous small clusters.



Control

Leafy spurge roots can extend 4.5 m laterally and about 9 m deep, therefore tillage, mowing, burning and hand-pulling are generally ineffective control methods. Because of its irritating juices, after handling this plant, never touch your eyes or face until hands are thoroughly washed.

A few herbicides have successfully reduced the density of infestations, but timing is critical. A combination of chemical control and seeding/fertilizing to encourage competition from desirable vegetation is the best approach. However in large infestations, where the costs of labour and chemical are greatest, biological control will be the most likely avenue to achieve control. This method will not remove the weed, but instead facilitates increased competition by desirable vegetation.

Any Leafy spurge control strategy will require several years of commitment because of its extensive root system. As always, prevention is the most successful route – good land management practices and insisting on the purity of purchased seed and forage.