

# Leafy Spurge



flowers

leaves

seeds

# Leafy Spurge

**Genus:** Euphorbia

**Species:** esula

**Priority Listing:** 2B

**Biological control agents:** 7 insects are available, and 3 insects are listed as very effective (brown legged leafy spurge flea beetle, black dot leafy spurge flea beetle, black leafy spurge flea beetle)

**Perennial**

Leafy spurge is native to Eurasia and was accidentally introduced into the United States as a contaminant in crop seed.

Leafy spurge is well suited to survive in dry, open environments. The leaves of leafy spurge are small and **lanceolate** with a smooth margin.

Flowers are produced in **umbels** with a pair of bright yellow-green petal like **bracts** at the base of the flower head. 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 underground **lateral roots** can expand up to 15' across and can reach up to 24' in depth. The root system has 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 to 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 dries, it breaks open and the seeds are forced out with a tremendous force, up to 15' 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.



Fall foliage photo courtesy of William M. Ciesla, Forest Health Management International. Bugwood.org

**Biological Control Agents:**

a method of controlling pests (including insects, mites, weeds and plant diseases) using other living organisms

**Bracts:** a modified leaf that often wraps at the base of a flower, these leaves vary in shape and size from the plant's other leaves

**Integrated Weed**

**Management Techniques:** the combination of multiple

management tools to reduce a pest population to an acceptable level while preserving the quality of existing habitat, water, and other natural resources

**Lanceolate:** tapering from a rounded base toward an apex; lance-shaped

**Lateral roots:** roots forming on the side of a taproot

**Perennial:** a plant whose life spans several years

**Toxic:** poisonous quality based upon poisonous substances at the cellular level of organisms

**Umbel:** flat-topped or rounded flower cluster where the individual flower stalks arise from about the same point, creating a flower shape somewhat like an umbrella

**Viable:** capable of growing or developing