



Myrtle spurge

Euphorbia myrsinites

Family: Malvaceae

Class B-Designate Noxious Weed

Control Required

Background Information



Myrtle spurge is a perennial forb of the Euphorbiaceae family. It was introduced into the U. S. from Eurasia as an ornamental, valued for its water wise characteristics. Myrtle spurge was found to flourish under minimal water in the driest and poorest soils. This ground hugging plant does very well in our arid climate, performing well on dry, rocky banks and in garden settings. Myrtle spurge plants and seeds are long lived; seeds are ejected as far as 15 feet when seedpods explode. New plants can also be produced from root fragments. Although the plant is toxic birds spread seeds further. If ingested the plant causes nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Skin contact with its milky sap can cause redness, swelling and blisters. Eye protection, gloves, long sleeves and long pants should be worn when dealing with Myrtle spurge. **Myrtle spurge is on the WA State quarantine list. It is prohibited to transport, buy, sell, offer for sale, or distribute plants or plant parts, seeds in packets, blends, or wildflower mixes of this species, into or within the state of Washington.** See WAC 16-752 for more detail.

Impacts

Myrtle spurge is a danger to people because of its toxicity. Myrtle spurge exudes a milky sap which can be a severe irritant to the skin and eyes. It may even cause blindness. It invades disturbed areas outcompeting native plants and displacing vegetation. Ejected seeds can stick to the fur of animals which are then transported far from the original plant. Myrtle spurge will invade fields, rangeland, disturbed ground, roadsides and waste ways.

Key Identifying Traits

- ◆ Ground hugging plant growing 4-8 inches tall
- ◆ Fleshy, waxy, greyish green leaves spiral around the stem
- ◆ Trailing stems grow to about 18 inches in length.
- ◆ Small yellowish green flowers with bright yellow bracts
- ◆ White milky sap is exuded when any part of the plant is broken



Leaves arranged in a spiral around the stem

Biology and Ecology

- ◆ Tap rooted, herbaceous perennial readily producing from seed or root fragments
- ◆ Prefers dry, well-drained soils in part to full sun
- ◆ Milky sap may cause dermatitis, burns or blisters in sensitive people
- ◆ .New stems branch out from the center taproot each year
- ◆ Long lived plants and seeds; seed viability of up to 8 years
- ◆ Plants are generally avoided by livestock



Toxic white milky sap

Control Measures

Prevention: Know your property and learn to identify plants.

Biological: None available at this time

Cultural: Do not allow plants to go to seed. Plants do not withstand regular cultivation.

Mechanical: Pull or dig up individual plants before they have a chance to seed; be sure to get the entire tap root (**Protect your skin and eyes**). It is best to pull or dig plants when the ground is moist. Monitor the area for regrowth.

Chemical: In non-cropland spot treatments of a contact herbicide such as 2,4-D, Dicamba or glyphosate applied late fall can be effective but will have to be maintained to exhaust the seed bank. Imazapic (Plateau) applied late summer to fall before spurge loses its milky sap to drought or a killing frost will provide soil residual activity. The use of a surfactant is needed to penetrate the waxy leaf surface.

ALWAYS FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS, THE LABEL IS THE LAW

For this and other publications, see our website at: fcweedboard.com

Photos: WA State Noxious Weed Control Board & Benton County Noxious Weed Control Board