

Leafy spurge

Euphorbia virgata

Description

This plant is native to Europe and Asia and was likely introduced to North America. This species is listed under Regulation No. 715 - Seed Law Implementation as a prohibited noxious weed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Habit

Herbaceous perennial ranging in height from 15-92 cm (6-36 in); root system can extend up to 6 m (~20 ft).

Leaves

Simple, alternate, long, narrow, bluish green in color, usually pointed and drooping with smooth margins, exude white milky sap when crushed.

Stems

Upright stems that branch towards the top of the plant; dry stems may persist into the winter and following summer; stems also release white, milky sap when broken.





Flowers

Small, yellowish-green in color, fused petals form a cuplike structure; blooms mid-June through late-July.

Fruits and Seeds

Smooth, oblong, gray-brown seeds in explosive capsules; one plant can produce up to 200 seeds; high germination rate; viable up to 8 years with adequate moisture.

Habitat

Roadsides, prairies, savannas, gravel pits, open areas.

Reproduction

By seed. Also spreads rapidly through its persistent root system from crown and root buds that over-winter under the soil surface.

Similar

Flowering spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*) has white flowers and erect leaves; non-native Cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*) has stem leaf blades less than 2.5 mm wide.

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Monitor open sites and woodland edges, early detection is critical. Leaves out early in spring; bright yellow-green bracts appear in late May or early June. Seedlings develop buds within 7-10 days of emergence. Long shoots spread laterally; pulling, digging, burning and tilling may cause them to increase. Foliar herbicide treatment provides effective control of small occurrences. Surveillance and control efforts needed for 5-10 years.

Credits

The Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) has partnered with MISIN to provide the information

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