

# Leafy spurge

*Euphorbia esula* L.

Spurge Family

## Key identifying traits

- ❑ Showy pairs of yellow-green, heart shaped bracts (often mistaken for flowers)
- ❑ Entire plant contains a milky juice (sap)
- ❑ Roots are extensive with pink buds for new shoots or roots
- ❑ Leaves are alternate, narrow, 1 to 4 inches long
- ❑ Single stalks or multiple stems, up to 3 feet tall
- ❑ True flowers are yellow-green but inconspicuous
- ❑ Seeds are contained in a 3-celled capsule

## Biology and ecology

- Perennial; reproduces by vigorous root stalks and seed; seed capsules explode when dry, projecting seeds up to 20 feet
- Sap can be an extreme irritant to man or beast
- Invades a wide variety of sites- dry hillsides, wet meadows, riparian areas, roadsides
- Once plants are well established (3 years) large nutrient reserves in the extensive root system make control difficult & expensive and eradication nearly impossible
- Forms dense stands grazed only by goats/sheep

## Control

*Prevention*- Learn to identify the plant; know your property; beware of fill dirt, hay and seed from outside your area

*Biological* - Several used in combination with sheep and with herbicides to combat extensive infestations in the mountain west; trial colony only in Stevens Co

*Cultural* - Competitive vegetation helps but does not stop infestations

*Mechanical* - Persistent, almost zealous digging or cultivation is required to be at all successful

*Chemical* - A few are effective if applied using the correct rates, timing, mixtures, and adjuvants; most effective herbicides generally require a pesticide license. Many years required. Monitor for several years after last top growth is seen.



young plants



**Where found** - Small infestations found scattered around Stevens County; active ID and cost share control programs have limited the acres involved to less than 100