

# Myrtle Spurge/Cypress Spurge Identification and Management

Myrtle spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*) and cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*) are non-native, escaped ornamental perennials that reproduce by seed and spread underground by the root system. The roots are brown and grow out from the central taproot in myrtle spurge and from lateral buds in cypress spurge, producing new shoots along their length. Myrtle spurge is low growing, with stems 12-18 inches long that lay close to the ground and are dense with thick, blue-green, fleshy leaves. Leaves are alternate, stiff, triangular, an inch or less, and spiral around the stem. Cypress spurge has smooth, erect stems with linear, narrow leaves up to 1.5 inches long.

The flowers are very small and yellowish-green, enclosed by very visible yellowish-green bracts. Flower clusters develop from March to May. One large spurge plant can produce thousands of seeds from three-sided seed capsules that explode when ripe and project the seeds up to 15 feet away from the parent plant.

These plants contain white, milky sap that exudes readily upon stem or leaf breakage. This sap can be very damaging to eyes and skin, causing severe irritation and burning.



Myrtle spurge has adapted to rocky, sandy soils and xeric climates. Cypress spurge can infest woodlands, pastures and roadsides. Where they become established, they crowd out native vegetation. The competitive, rapidly growing, and extensive root system makes them difficult to kill completely, as new shoots can sprout from broken root fragments.

**Myrtle spurge and cypress spurge have been placed on the "A" List of the Colorado State noxious weed list. This means these plants must be eradicated from any and all properties in Colorado.** Once eliminated, there may still be seed and rootstock in the ground that will propagate new plants. Therefore, spurge sites must be periodically monitored for new growth, and again treated. The most effective method to prevent escape is to remove garden specimens and encourage neighbors to do the same.

## Recommended Management Methods:

**Cultural** – Seeding and maintaining aggressive grasses will help in competing with myrtle spurge and slow its spread. Contact your local CSU Extension office or Natural Resources Conservation Service office for seed mix recommendations. Bare spots caused by disturbance or bad soil are prime habitat for weed infestations.

**Mechanical** – Hand-pulling this plant is the easiest way to control small populations. Wear gloves whenever handling this plant, and monitor the area to spot and remove reoccurring shoots.

**Herbicides** – Following are recommendations for herbicides that can be applied to range and pasturelands. Always read, understand, and follow herbicide label directions. The herbicide label is the LAW!

Herbicide	Rate	Application Timing/Comments
Roundup	2-3 qts/acre or 2-3 oz/gal water	Non-selective – do not let spray drift to non-target species.

\*\*Products containing 2,4-D or dicamba may also be effective.

**Alternatives** – Sedums, hen and chicks, moss rose (*Portulaca grandiflora*), alyssum and phlox are safe alternatives, and many more choices can be found at these websites:

CSU Cooperative Extension – Horticulture – “Xeriscaping: Ground Cover Plants”  
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07230.html>

Colorado Native Plant Society – “Suggested Native Plants For Use on the Front Range of Colorado”  
<http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~shill/pdf/CoNPSPlantList.pdf>

CSU Cooperative Extension and Denver Botanic Garden’s **Plant Select**® List  
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/psel/pslist.html>

### Escaped Myrtle Spurge



If you have any questions, please contact the Weld County Public Works Dept., Weed Division at (970) 304-6496 ext. 3770. Please visit our website [www.weldweeds.org](http://www.weldweeds.org).