

Myrtle spurge

Colorado Department of
Agriculture

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Key ID Points

1. Low growing plant with blue-green, waxy leaves.
2. Flowers are yellow-green petal like bracts that appear from March to May.

Myrtle spurge Identification and Management



Identification and Impacts

Myrrtle spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*) is a low growing perennial with trailing fleshy stems. The leaves are fleshy, blue-green and alternate. Flowers are inconspicuous with yellow-green, petal-like bracts that appear from March to May. Myrtle spurge spreads by seed and plants are capable of projecting seeds up to 15 feet. The plant grows from a taproot, with new stems emerging in early spring and dying back in the winter. Plants can grow up to 8-12 inches high and 12-18 inches in width.

Myrrtle spurge contains a toxic, milky sap which can cause severe skin irritations, including blistering. This plant is poisonous if ingested; causing nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Wearing gloves, long sleeves, shoes, and eye protection is highly recommended when in contact with myrtle spurge, as all plant parts are considered poisonous.

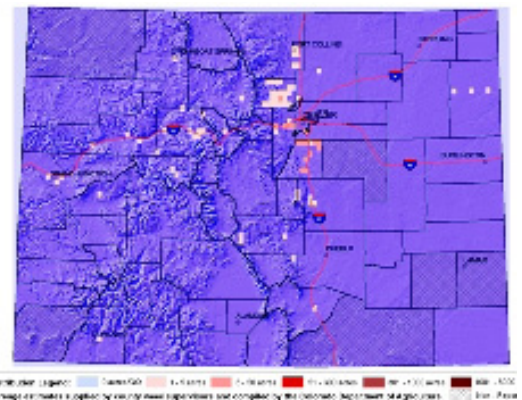
Myrrtle spurge is an invasive ornamental that is native to Eurasia. It is popular with xeriscapes and rock gardens, preferring sunny to partly sunny areas and well drained soils. Myrtle spurge rapidly escapes gardens and invades sensitive ecosystems, out competing native

vegetation and reducing wildlife forage. Alternatives to planting myrtle spurge include native plants such as sulphur flower (*Erigeron umbellatum*), Kinnikinnick (*artcostaphylos uvursi*), or creeping mahonia (*Mahonia repens*). The soil seed reserve of myrtle spurge is estimated to be eight years. The site must be monitored for at least nine years after the last flowering adult plants have been eliminated and treatments repeated when necessary.

The key to effective control of myrtle spurge is to remove plants prior to seed set and to detect and remove new populations in natural areas early on. Small areas can be easily removed by mechanical means but should be done early to prevent triggering seed launching. Details on the back of this sheet can help to create a management plan compatible with your site ecology.

Myrrtle spurge is designated as a "List A" species in the Colorado Noxious Weed Act. It is designated for statewide eradication. For more information visit www.colorado.gov/ag/weeds and click on the Noxious Weed Management Program. Or call the State Weed Coordinator at the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Conservation Services Division, 303-239-4100.

Map of myrtle spurge infestation.



Photos © Kelly Uhing, Colorado Department of Agriculture and (above) Crystal Andrews, Colorado Department of Agriculture.

Euphorbia myrsinites

**CULTURAL**

Keeping desirable vegetation healthy and thick will help keep invaders out. Prevent the establishment of new infestations by minimizing disturbance and seed dispersal. Survey your land regularly to detect new invaders and eradicate any new populations quickly.

**BIOLOGICAL**

Biocontrol is not an approved method of control for State List A species. Eradication as the management objective for all List A species. For more information on insect biocontrol in Colorado, please contact the Palisade Insectary of the Colorado Department of Agriculture at 970-464-7916

**MECHANICAL**

Hand pull or dig when soil is moist. Make certain to pull all the roots and wear rubber gloves and eye protection to protect yourself from the toxic milky sap. Treatment follow up is important to check root fragment resprouts that will occur when the tap root is severed too shallow.

Integrated Weed Management:

Since Myrtle spurge spreads mainly by seed, it is very important to prevent seed production and deplete the seed bank. Remove mature plants prior to setting seed and seedlings whenever present.

Populations can be managed mechanically and by spot treatment of herbicides. It is important to be persistent with follow up treatments for many years.

Myrtle spurge

HERBICIDES

NOTE: The following are recommendations for herbicides that can be applied to range and pasturelands. Rates are approximate and based on equipment with an output of 30 gal/acre. Please read label for exact rates. **Always read, understand, and follow the label directions. The herbicide label is the LAW!**

Herbicide	Rate	Application Timing
2,4-D ester	2 qt./acre + 1% v/v methylated seed oil	Use a 2,4-D ester formulation that has a 4.0 lbs. active ingredient/acre. Apply during spring or during fall regrowth.
Dicamba + 2,4-D	1 pint/acre dicamba + 2-3 pints/acre 2,4-D (amine or ester)	Use a 2,4-D formulation that has a 4 lbs. active ingredient/gallon. Apply during spring or during fall regrowth.
Picloram (Tordon/Picloram 22K - Restricted use pesticide) + 2,4-D	20 oz./acre + 2-3 pints/acre 2,4-D (amine or ester)	Apply at flowering growth stage during spring or to fall regrowth. DO NOT use near trees, desirable shrubs, water, or high water table.

Additional herbicide recommendations for other species can be found at: www.colorado.gov/agconservation/CSUHerbicideRecommendations.pdf