

# WEED OF THE MONTH

# LEAFY SPURGE

January 2026



## Introduction

Welcome to our "Weed of the Month" feature, designed to raise awareness about the impact of noxious invasive weeds on our environment. This month, we're focusing on Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia virgata*), an aggressive plant species that poses a significant threat to native ecosystems and agricultural lands.

Leafy spurge is listed as an A-rated noxious weed. It can be found in scattered locations throughout northern California and crowding out native plant species. It can invade and dominate a variety of vegetation types, including prairies, grasslands and pine savannahs.

## Identification & Behavior

Leafy spurge can form dense patches that displace desirable vegetation. It is one of the most tenacious weeds in the United States, forming dense colonies that suppress both native plants and forage, resulting in reduced land values. Leafy spurge can be found in states such as Washington and Oregon and is expanding its range in California.

This noxious perennial can grow to be 3 ft tall, with milky white sap and smooth, oblong to elliptical leaves. During the summer, these spurges form umbel-like flower clusters at the stem tips, the flowers with yellow-green bracts. The flowers develop 3-chambered seed capsules with yellow-brown to grey seeds. Most seeds germinate in early spring, but germination may occur throughout the growing season. Seeds can remain viable for 8 years or more.

## Impact

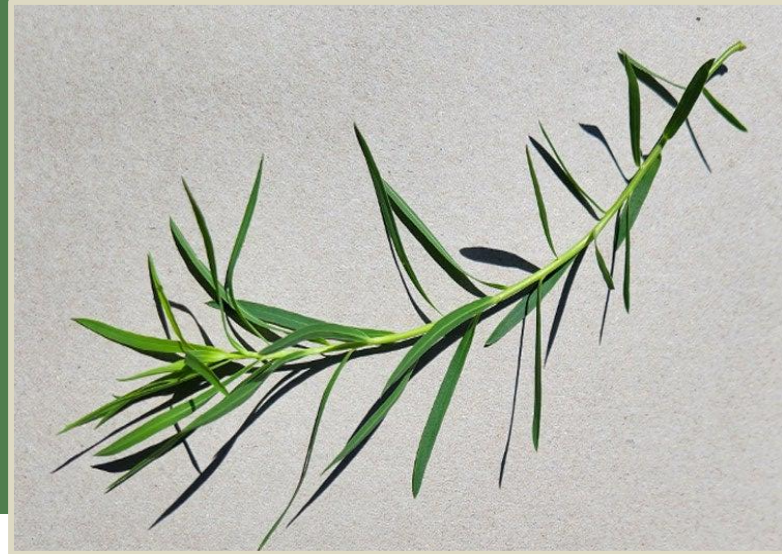
Leafy spurge is most aggressive in dry sites where plant competition is less intense. It is most abundant on coarse-textured soils and least abundant on clayey soils. It is one of the earliest plants to emerge in the spring and one of the last plants to enter dormancy in the fall. This early and late season growth makes leafy spurge more competitive over native plants.

The milky sap of leafy spurge is toxic and can irritate the skin, eyes, and digestive tracts of humans and other animals. Cattle avoid spurge, but goats and sheep appear tolerant to its properties.

Top left: Leafy spurge infestation  
Middle: Leafy spurge seeds  
Right: Leafy spurge flower

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## Control & Management

Mechanical control methods include hoeing, grubbing, or hand pulling before seed production. However, these methods must be repeated several times over the growing season (2 to 3 week intervals), and for several years. The grazing method is limited to goats and sheep since leafy spurge is toxic to other livestock.

Chemical control methods should be applied postemergence at flowering in early summer, or on fall regrowth. Branched-chain amino acid inhibitors should be applied at preemergence or early postemergence in fall when plants begin to grow but before hard freeze.

## Prevention

Identification is key when it comes to preventing and controlling the spread of Leafy spurge. Routinely inspect and maintain your property for any signs of this invader. Be vigilant for any signs of this weed in your area and report sightings to the Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office at (530) 822-7500.

By staying informed and taking proactive measures, we can work together to curb the spread of Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia virgata*) and protect our native ecosystems. Join us next month for a new "Weed of the Month" feature, where we'll highlight another noxious invasive plant and share tips on how to address it.

## Resources

For more information about Leafy spurge, visit the UC Davis Weed Research and Information Center website at:

<https://ucdavis.app.box.com/s/t266vkvfh1ym7bb7j57k5ufkrv9vrby3v/file/2053586711736>

For more weed newsletters or information about our other county programs, visit our website at:

<https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/agricultural-department>



**Thank you for your dedication to preserving our environment and agricultural land!**

**-Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office**