



# MASTER GARDENER

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

## Year Round Gardening

### **Myrtle Spurge**

Joan Nusbaum, Colorado Master Gardener

Myrtle spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*,) also known as donkey-tail spurge, is one of the earliest perennials to appear each spring. It is a highly invasive, ornamental plant, popular in xeriscapes and rock gardens in both residential and commercial areas in Colorado.



This low-growing perennial has trailing stems of fleshy blue-green alternate leaves.

Flowers are inconspicuous, surrounded by yellow-green flower-like bracts that appear from March to August. This plant has a height of up to 8" and can spread to 18".

Myrtle spurge does well in poor, rocky, or sandy soils and thrives in full sun. It is hardy throughout the Pikes Peak region. It reproduces only by seed and is capable of projecting seeds up to 15 feet. Seeds remain viable for up to eight years.



This plant is rapidly expanding into sensitive ecosystems, displacing native vegetation and reducing forage for wildlife. The same attributes that make it appealing to El Paso County gardeners (drought tolerance, hardiness, and tolerance of poor soils) also make it a successful competitor with native species. Because it is an invasive, non-native plant Myrtle spurge is a Colorado A List Species noxious weed, requiring eradication on all lands public and private.

The Colorado Noxious Weed Act was passed in 1996 to control noxious weeds in the state. "Noxious weed" is an alien plant designated by the Colorado Department of Agriculture as noxious, or has been declared a noxious weed by a local advisory board. To be designated noxious a plant must meet one or more of the following criteria: aggressively invades or is detrimental to economic crops or native plant communities; is poisonous to livestock; is a carrier of detrimental insects, diseases, or parasites; the direct or indirect effect of the presence of this plant is detrimental to the environmentally sound management of natural or agricultural ecosystems.

Plants are prioritized as List A, B, or C species by the Colorado Department of Agriculture. List A refers to rare noxious weeds that must be eradicated in order to protect neighboring communities and the state as a whole; list B weeds are discretely distributed and must be eradicated, contained, or suppressed depending on their location, to stop their continued spread; and list C weeds are widespread and well-established in Colorado and control is recommended by the state and may be required by local government.

Control methods for Myrtle spurge include mechanical removal (digging them up), removing seed heads before they are disbursed and chemical controls. Digging up is best done early in spring. Do not compost plant material it should be discarded.

Homeowner and business owner alike – beware! Myrtle spurge exudes a toxic, milky latex, which can cause severe skin irritations, so take necessary precautions by wearing rubber gloves and long sleeves if you are pulling it out. Reactions to touching this substance may land you in the nearest urgent care with skin rash and itchy eyes, nose and throat.

For more information on noxious weeds: <http://www.colorado.gov/ag/weeds>.

*When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions at [www.Ask.Extension.org](http://www.Ask.Extension.org). Find out about classes and other events at <http://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/>.*

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