

Myrtle Spurge

Euphorbia myrsinites

Myrtle spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*), also known as donkeytail spurge, is an attractive evergreen perennial common in gardens around Asotin County. Since it is drought tolerant, it is often used in xeriscaping (low water plantings). It does well in poor, rocky or sandy soils and thrives in full sun exposure. The plant blooms from April through mid May and reproduces by seed. Although the flowers themselves are inconspicuous, they are subtended by showy yellow bracts. The blue-green foliage, in addition to its hardiness, has made this a popular garden plant.

The spurge is poisonous when eaten. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The milky sap can cause skin irritation and permanent eye damage. The diterpene esters present in the sap has caused severe dermatitis in sensitive individuals. Wear eye protection, gloves, and long sleeves when dealing with this plant.

The State of Washington and the Asotin County Noxious Weed Control Boards have added this plant to the 2003 Noxious Weed list because of its tendencies to become invasive. The same characteristics that make this plant attractive to Asotin County gardeners (drought tolerance, hardiness, and tolerance of poor soils) also make it a successful competitor with native species. This plant has established itself in at least two locations along the Snake River, probably as a result of garden wastes. The Weed Board is asking gardeners to immediately contain the plants within their garden boundaries and begin planning complete removal. Other escaped ornamentals have cost millions of dollars to contain and control. Purple loosestrife, orange hawkweed, and Dalmatian Toadflax are three examples of escaped ornamentals that have caused, and are still causing, ecological and economic harm to our region. Eliminating small populations before they spread into thousands of acres is an environmentally and economically sound practice.

