

Myrtle Spurge - Toxic Noxious Weed Identified in Trinidad

By: Shelly L. Simmons

Coordinator, Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative

Noxious Weed Program of the Spanish Peaks-Purgatoire River Conservation District

<https://www.purgatoireconservation.org/>

All photos by Shelly L. Simmons unless otherwise noted

What is it?

Myrtle spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*) is native to Eurasia, and became a popular xeriscape plant several decades ago. However, it has now invaded many natural areas in the US, outcompeting native vegetation and reducing wildlife forage.

Where has it been found in Las Animas County?

Myrtle spurge has been positively identified within the City limits of Trinidad. Thus far, the plants have been found only in a handful of residential gardens. Additionally, myrtle spurge is growing in the rock planter beds near the main entrance of the Trinidad Golf Course (this is a good place to view the plants “in the foliage”).



*Mature myrtle spurge growing in rock planters at Trinidad Golf Course.
Myrtle spurge is a List A species, designated for eradication by the
State of Colorado.*

*Myrtle spurge plant (before flowering), Trinidad.
Notice old stems from previous year.*



Why is myrtle spurge a problem?

First and foremost, it is **TOXIC**, causing severe eye and skin irritation/blistering. It will cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea if accidentally ingested. Always handle these plants with care by wearing gloves, long sleeves, long pants and eye protection.

Second, it is a non-native, invasive plant that can rapidly escape gardens and invade natural ecosystems. Myrtle spurge is a List A species and eradication is required per the State of Colorado.

How to identify myrtle spurge

1. Low growing, perennial plant with fleshy, sprawling stems, growing up to 8-12 inches high and up to 12-24 inches in width.
2. Leaves are succulent in nature (fleshy), blue-green and alternate (meaning they alternate sides as they occur on the stem).
3. Flowers are inconspicuous, starting out as yellow-green, petal-like bracts that typically begin to appear from March to June, turning pinkish as they mature.
4. The plant grows from a taproot, with new stems emerging in the early spring and dying back in the winter.
5. Myrtle spurge easily spreads by seeds, and plants are capable of launching seeds up to 15 feet. Seeds are thought to live in the soil for up to eight years.



*Mature myrtle spurge plant in mature flower stage, Trinidad.
Photo by: Michelle Roberts, Purgatoire River Valley Gardeners*

Is there a management plan?

The Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative (PWWMC) is leading the effort to bring together all state and local jurisdictions, and local conservation groups to tackle myrtle spurge. Partners will have a management plan in place by the end of 2020, with implementation to begin in 2021.

What to do if you find myrtle spurge?

Please report potential sightings of myrtle spurge to the Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative, Shelly L. Simmons at ssimmons@purgatoireconservation.org or contact your local county or city officials.

Additionally, if you observe this plant being sold at plant nurseries (brick and mortar stores, box stores, or web-based retailers) please contact the Colorado Department of Agriculture at 303.869.9030. This plant is illegal to sell in the State of Colorado.

How do you control myrtle spurge?

The key to effective control is removal of plants prior to seed set and to detect and remove plants early in their establishment. Small areas can easily be removed by mechanical means, but this should be done before seeds are set. Hand pull (with protective gloves/long sleeves/eye protection) or dig when the soil is moist, being sure to remove the entire tap root; if the entire root is not removed, plants will re-sprout from left over root fragments. Herbicide applications can also be effective. Apply 2,4-D ester according to product label before seed set in spring or to new fall rosettes.

What about other noxious weeds?

The Spanish Peaks-Purgatoire River Conservation District (SPPRCD) houses the Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative (PWWMC). PWWMC facilitates noxious weed management in Las Animas County and provides landowner cost share and cost incentive programs for managing noxious weeds and land restoration (NOTE: Landowners must reside within SPPRCD boundaries to qualify for landowner programs). PWWMC also provides technical assistance and educational programs to *any* interested person or organization.

If you have questions about noxious weed management or land restoration practices, please contact the PWWMC Coordinator, Shelly L. Simmons at ssimmons@purgatoireconservation.org or at 719.469.2847. You can also visit our website at <https://www.purgatoireconservation.org/> .

Source for this article: CO Department of Agriculture, Myrtle Spurge Fact Sheet - <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agconservation/myrtle-spurge>