Leafy Spurge Encyclopedia Article

Leafy Spurge

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Leafy Spurge

Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula* L.), a perennial plant from Europe and Asia, was introduced to North America through imported grain products by 1827. It is 12 in (30.5 cm) to 3 ft (1 m) in height. Stems, leaves, and roots contain milky white latex which contains toxic cardiac glycosides that is distasteful to cattle, who will not eat it. Considered a noxious, or destructive, weed in southern Canada and the northern Great Plains of the United States, it crowds out native rangeland grasses, reducing the number of cattle that can graze the land. It is responsible for losses of approximately 35–45 million dollars per year to the United States cattle and hay industries. Its aggressive root system makes controlling spread difficult. Roots spread vertically to 15 ft (5 m) with up to 300 root buds, and horizontally to nearly 30 ft (9 m). It regenerates from small portions of root. Tilling, burning, and **herbicide** use are ineffective control methods as roots are not damaged and may prevent immediate regrowth of the desired **species**. The introduction of specific herbivores of the leafy spurge from its native range, including certain species of beetles and moths, may be an effective means of control, as may be certain pathogenic **fungi**. Studies also indicate sheep and Angora goats will eat it. To control this plant's rampant spread in North America, a combination of methods seems most effective.