

SAVING UTAH'S LANDSCAPE PURGE YOUR SPURGE



Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

Myrtle Spurge

Euphorbia myrsinites



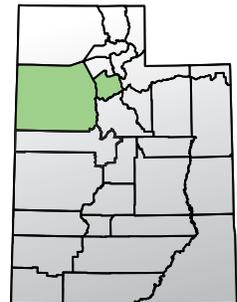
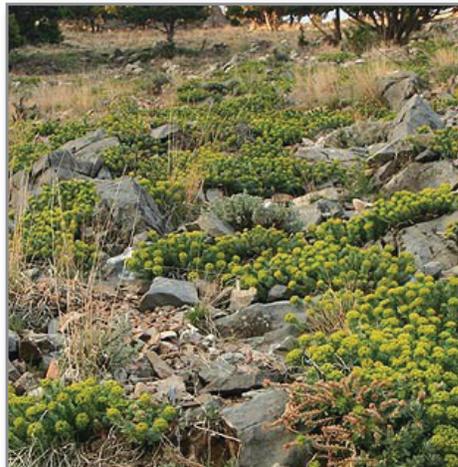
Myrtle spurge, also known as donkey tail or creeping spurge, is a native to Eurasia. It was introduced to North America as an ornamental and is often used in rock gardens. This plant has escaped cultivation in some areas, invading well-drained areas. Myrtle spurge is poisonous if digested, causing nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Additionally, the milky sap can cause swelling, redness and blistering of the skin, and, irritation to the eyes. Myrtle spurge is usually spread by seed, although root fragments can also produce new plants. Myrtle spurge can be controlled through chemical and mechanical means. Small infestations can be hand pulled or dug. As much root as possible should be removed and the area should be monitored in future years to prevent reinfestation. Care should be taken to prevent the sap from contacting skin or eyes.

How do you get residents in a vast metropolitan area like Salt Lake City to understand the threat of invading and noxious weeds? The Bonneville Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) focused their attention on an escaping ornamental. Myrtle spurge was turning the hills on the east side of the valley a spectacular chartreuse each spring. Some investigation by the Salt Lake County Weed Program indicated that a popular landscaping plant had escaped and was now an exploding infestation. After discovering the plant had been listed as a noxious weed in Colorado, they targeted myrtle spurge as a new invader. The CWMA began mapping the infestations, determining the best methods of control, then treating it, and handing out brochures to explain what the plant was doing to the natural landscape. The Salt Lake County Weed Board officially listed myrtle spurge a noxious weed.

In April 2007, the CWMA offered homeowners in Salt Lake County native plants in exchange for uprooted myrtle spurge from their yards and gardens. Their "Purge Your Spurge" event was held on two Saturdays at the Salt Lake REI store and resulted in 277 landowners bringing in more than 6500 pounds of myrtle spurge, for which they received 1,400 native plants!

The educational value of the project was twofold: Many people who didn't know myrtle spurge wasn't part of the native landscape learned how a beautiful garden plant had become an alien invader displacing beneficial vegetation. This was easier for urban dwellers to understand than the threat of noxious weeds on range or croplands. Plant nurseries that were partners in the project became more aware of the danger of selling noxious and invading weeds as landscaping plants.

The CWMA plans to continue its "Purge the Spurge" campaign during 2008, as funding becomes available.



Bonneville Cooperative Weed Management Area (above) targeted Myrtle spurge at the urban interface on Salt Lake County's east side (left.)

PURGE YOUR SPURGE

Steps to Success:

- The Bonneville CWMA focuses on open space, natural landscapes, and Salt Lake County watershed lands.
- A staff person was selected to do administrative work and coordinate partnerships and projects.
- Efforts are directed to grant-funded projects and having extra funding in place for site specific projects.
- Partners are dedicated and committed to providing resources and work as needed for various projects.
- Education of the public is emphasized as the most cost-efficient method of control for most of the partners, who don't have funding and technical expertise for large control projects.
- Local Extension agent Maggie Wolf writes articles for publication in the Salt Lake Tribune to make people aware of noxious weed problems.

Looking to the Future:

- Continue to work with partners to control weeds at specific sites.
- Emphasize early detection and rapid response of new invaders, i.e., garlic mustard, sulfur cinquefoil and myrtle spurge.
- Develop and maintain an inventory.
- Develop specific weed management objectives.
- Establish control priorities for weed species and or weed infestations.
- Coordinate the use of resources and personnel.
- Develop area wide informational, educational, and public awareness material.
- Encourage the Salt Lake County Weed Board to add weeds to the noxious weed lists as needed. Most recently, Dalmatian toadflax, myrtle spurge and garlic mustard were designated.

What you can do:

- Call the Salt Lake County weed hotline: (801) 468-2861.

Partners

Salt Lake County
Tooele County
Utah County
Utah Department of Natural Resources

Utah Department of Transportation

USDA Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Murray City
Salt Lake City
Utah Association of Conservation Districts

Salt Lake Conservation District
Cottonwood Canyons Foundation

Kennecott Copper
Great Salt Lake Resource Conservation & Development Council

Utah State University Extension
Intermountain Native Plant Growers Association

Utah Native Plant Society
South Shore CWMA
Summit County CWMA
REI



Nearly 300 landowners participated in the "Purge Your Spurge" event. Native plants were given in exchange to those who brought in Myrtle spurge.

