

## Leafy Spurge

If you own land along the Old Man River system or any river in Southern Alberta you more than likely have a yellow flowering weed called Leafy Spurge. Leafy Spurge is classed as a noxious weed under the Alberta weed act.

Why is Leafy Spurge so bad? Leafy Spurge has found a home in our river bottoms. It has a root system on it that is similar to quack grass, with nodes every centimeter which allow these plants to regenerate along with setting seed. Leafy Spurge prohibits the growth of other plants and it is toxic to most animals. It causes digestive system upsets and blisters in mouths and lips of cattle. Spurge has been in the river bottom for years but it is now slowly creeping its way up the coulee on to the flat lands that are cultivated.

The MD of Taber has been in cooperation with Agriculture Canada since the early 1980's in using bugs to control Leafy Spurge along the Old Man River. In the 80's and early biological control utilized the 'brown' bug. Now the biological agent used is the Black Leafy Spurge Flea Beetles or in Latin '*Aphthona lacertosa*'.

In conjunction with the land owner Agricultural Service Board staff find suitable spots of spurge on the land. The Black Leafy Spurge Flea Beetles are released around the end of June in to areas of Leafy Spurge growth along the river where upon the beetles go to work.

These beetles have a two fold mission on reducing the weed count. The first means of controlling the spurge is that the beetle defoliates the plant which creates enough stress on the plant that it does not set seed. The second means of control is that as part of the beetle's reproductive cycle it lays eggs at ground surface on the stem of the plant - the eggs hatch and the larvae then bore in to the stem and chew their way through the root system.

Agriculture Canada research scientists that are stationed in the Lethbridge offices have been studying these little beetles to find out their likes and dislikes. Municipal staff have also spent a lot of time in the river bottom studying the drop sites. Each year the M.D. of Taber and Ag Canada have placed about ten sites along the river system from the West end of our municipality where we meet up with the County of Lethbridge all the way to the east end where we meet with the County of Forty Mile. We have well over a hundred sites now, some flourishing and cleaning up the spurge and others that are not as well established.

Using bugs for control is certainly not fast as they take years to get established enough to get ahead of the weeds. Research over the last few years has brought in other bugs for other weeds like Dalmatian Toadflax, Knapweeds and Hounds Tongue. If you own land along the river or have friends or family that do and are interested in learning more about this program that the M.D. offers have them call the Agricultural Service Board at 403 223 8735