The biology and non-chemical control of Caper Spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris* L.)

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Caper Spurge
Euphorbia lathyris L.

Occurrence
Caper spurge is a herbaceous biennial, that may occur in fields and gardens (Long, 1938). It is found as a casual in waste places and is possibly native in shady places (Stace, 1997; Clapham *et al.*, 1987). It was first recorded as a native plant in Berkshire in 1805 (Druce, 1911). Later it was recorded in Northamptonshire in 1838 and then in Somerset, Hereford and Huntingdon. The plant has been found in cottage gardens and coppiced woods (Britton, 1913).

The seeds are poisonous (Barker, 2001). The plant exudes an irritating milky sap when damaged (Long, 1938). It has been suggested that caper spurge could be a source of hydrocarbons if grown as a potential fuel-producing crop (Garcia-Baudin *et al.*, 1985).

Biology
Caper spurge flowers from June to July (Morse & Palmer, 1925).

The seeds germinate in May (Salisbury, 1961).

Persistence and Spread
Caper spurge seeds appear able to remain viable for long periods (Salisbury, 1961).

When ripe the seeds are dispersed explosively. The seeds bear an elaiosome in the form of a caruncle that is attractive to ants that may help with seed dispersal (Pemberton & Irving, 1990).

Management
Ordinary cultivations should give adequate control (Morse & Palmer, 1925). It is important to prevent seeding.

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