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NOXIOUS WEEDS MAY BE PRETTY, BUT...

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THEY THREATEN YOUR ENVIRONMENT!

This beautiful meadow of flowers is actually Spotted Knapweed. Give it an inch and it will take a mile. Knapweed and similar destructive plants are marching across the West like an invading army. Their harmful effects on the landscape have earned them a reputation as noxious weeds. They crowd out native plants, destroy wildlife habitat, and make life miserable for city dwellers as well as farmers and ranchers.

Most noxious weeds are not native to the United States. Some were brought to this country intentionally and allowed to gain a foothold before their harmful effects were known. Others crossed the border by accident, many of them mixed in with shipments of desirable seeds or lying dormant in rocks used as ballast in sailing ships. Because they have no natural enemies in this country, all are spreading rapidly. If left unchecked, it may be impossible to control them in the years ahead. Damage in human and environmental terms can be staggering.

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Drake, Joan.
Noxious weeds may be pretty,
but ...

These five noxious weeds are examples of many that are threatening our environment

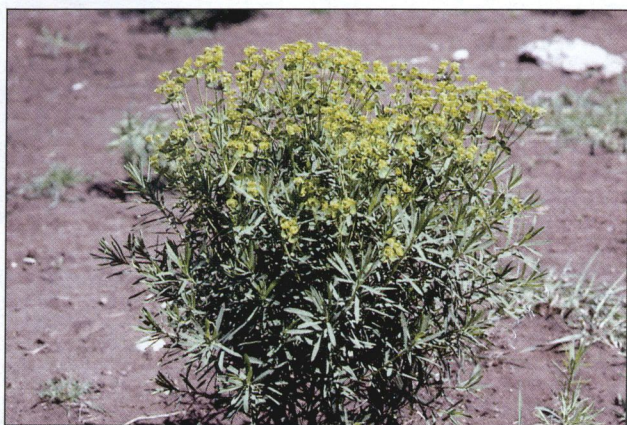
PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Purple Loosestrife thrives in moist soil—near rivers, streams, irrigation canals, drainage ditches, lake shores, wet meadows and marshes. It's easiest to identify when the purple-magenta flowers bloom from mid-June through mid-September. The blossoms have five to six petals and grow in clusters at the end of long spikes. The lower leaves are lance-like, 2 to 4 inches long, with smooth edges. In autumn, they dry and turn bright red for about 10 days. A single plant of this European species can grow to 10 feet tall and 5 feet wide. Purple Loosestrife was probably originally introduced as an ornamental plant.



LEAFY SPURGE

Leafy Spurge is a member of a diverse family of plants, many of which emit a toxic milky juice when their stems or leaves are damaged. This particular variety grows to 3 feet tall and is found primarily in grassland areas. The lower leaves are narrow and from 1 to 4 inches long. Those near the clusters of yellowish-green flowers are heart-shaped. The yellow floral bracts (modified leaves beneath the flower) resemble a set of miniature, but stout horns. The entire plant turns bright red or orange in the fall. Its high numbers of seeds and deep roots make this European import extremely difficult to control.



GORSE

People often mistake Gorse for Scotch broom. Scotch broom is bad, too, but gorse has vicious spines. Yellow flowers, which look similar to pea blossoms, grow in clusters near the ends of the branches. The leaves can be 1/2 to 2 inches long and are stiff and spine-like. These plants can grow to 10 feet tall. Gorse was brought from Europe to the Pacific Northwest as a garden shrub, but it now grows wild, covering thousands of acres, particularly along the coast.



YELLOW STARHISTLE

Other grassland noxious plants include knapweeds and starthistles, natives of the Mediterranean area or Asia. Yellow Starthistle is typical. Below its bright flowers, which bloom from June to August, are needle-sharp spines, some as much as an inch long. The plant's long, narrow leaves and stiff upright stem are grayish in color and woolly. The plants vary widely in size depending on the growing conditions, but average 1 to 2 feet in height.



PUNCTUREVINE

Puncturevine gets its name from the thorny burrs on this plant's seed pods. The plant typically grows close to the ground, with 6- to 20-inch stems branching from the base to form a dense mat. The slender branches have numerous leaves, each with five to eight pairs of oblong leaflets, and small, yellow, five-petaled flowers. In summer, the sharp, stout thorns attach to objects passing over the plant. The weed has been transported to metropolitan areas, where it grows in parks and playing fields and along highways and railroad tracks.





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