

Euphorbia L. SPURGE

Euphorbia peplus L., PETTY SPURGE. Annual, taprooted, not rosetted, typically 1-stemmed at base, repeatedly forked from midplant, ascending to erect, 10–45 cm tall; monoecious; shoots with only cauline leaves, glabrous; latex white, copious. **Stems:** cylindrical, to 3 mm diameter, green, often dark red at base. **Leaves:** helically alternate + opposite and pairs fused across node (at the lowest nodes and approaching inflorescence), simple, petiolate, without stipules; petiole flat to shallowly channeled, 1–7 mm long; blade symmetric, oval to obovate, 11–20.5 × 6–10 mm, broadly tapered to tapered at base, entire, obtuse often minutely pointed at tip, pinnately veined with principal veins slightly raised on lower surface, dull, often reddish on margins. **Inflorescence:** cyathium (= involucre with staminate flowers and 1 pistillate flower), terminal and axillary in leafy umbel-like array + sometimes on 1–2 lateral leafy cymes below array, umbel cymelike and 1–3(–5)-forked; peduncle 0.5–0.8 mm long; **cyathium** ± 1.5 mm across (including spreading glands and horns); **involucre** urn-shaped, 0.7–1.2 × 0.6–1 mm, pale green, glabrous, with 5 bracts and 4 glands, the bracts of involucre fused most of length forming 3 tongue-shaped lobes on 1 side of a notch + 3 acute lobes with a short one at base of notch, lobes 0.1–0.4 mm long, short-ciliate, the glands alternate with bracts (1 absent), nectar-producing, raised, transversely oblong, 0.3–0.6 mm long, fleshy, green, with a hornlike extension at opposite ends of each gland 0.2–0.6 mm long, pale green; staminate flowers 10–15, in 5 clusters, each cluster with 2–3 flowers, stalked, each cluster associated with 1 bractlet; bractlet linear, < 1 mm long, colorless, sparsely fringed at tip, the pedicel ± 0.5 mm long, pale green; pistillate flower on a pedicel-like stalk (gynophore), at anthesis gynophore short and erect, with only styles exposed from involucre, soon gynophore elongating and becoming recurved with maturing ovary exerted. **Staminate flower:** reduced to 1 stamen; filament < 0.2 mm long, whitish; anther basifixed, conspicuously dithecal, each sac broadly ellipsoid, ± 0.2 × 0.25 mm, yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen yellow. **Pistillate flower:** reduced to pistil; ovary superior, 3-lobed ovoid, 0.4–0.5 mm long, green, strongly 2-keeled on lobes, glabrous, 3-chambered, each chamber with 1 ovule; styles 3, 0.4 mm long, 2-branched at midpoint, the branches short-cylindric, greenish below and yellowish green at tip; stigmas minute. **Fruit:** capsule, 3-seeded, 3-lobed and broadly triangular-ovoid, 1.8–2 × 1.9–2.2 mm, prominently 2-crested on valve face, elastically dehiscent along septa and chambers into 6 dry valves (some valve-pairs remaining attached at base) and expelling seeds. **Seed:** with fleshy appendage (caruncle), oblong, 1.2–1.5 × 1 mm, whitish gray to whitish tan on surface and darker in depressions, ridged and with 5–6 vertical rows of 2–5 ± circular depressions on 1 face, with 2 elongate depressions separated by a narrow groove on opposite face; seed coat minutely honeycombed; caruncle = swelling at base of seed, depressed at oblique tip. Late December–mid-October.

Naturalized. Annual common near gardens and public areas in parks but also occurring as a ruderal weed along roadsides or trails throughout the range, in sunshine or shade.

Euphorbia peplus tends to be a winter annual but can be found in fresh condition at any location within range where supplemental water is provided.

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