

**Botanical Name:** Euphorbia

**Common Name:** Spurge

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae

**Origin:** Africa, Madagascar, Americas, Mediterranean, Asia

In my garden in June there is a sweet coconut smell in the air. The scent is from the beautiful Euphorbia leucocephala or Snow Flake. It is a member of the Euphorbiaceae family, commonly known as Spurges.

The Euphorbiaceae family (one of my favourite plant families) is a large and diverse genus (over 2000 members). The members of this family range from the E. pulcherrima (Poinsettia), E. milii (Crown of Thorns) to plants that are often incorrectly referred to as cacti such as E. obesa and E. baioensis.

Euphorbias range from tiny annual plants to large long-live trees. In Australia some are even considered weeds.

Euphorbias all share several characteristics; poisonous, milky, white sap (latex) and unique floral structures.

### **Sap**

The milky sap of spurges (called "latex"):

- Evolved as a deterrent to herbivores.
- Is usually white and transparent when dry.
- Seeps from the slightest wound and congeals after a few minutes in air.
- Is skin-irritating and caustic
- Contact with mucous membranes (eyes, nose and mouth) causes an extremely painful inflammation.
- May cause mild to extreme Keratouveitis, an inflammatory condition of the eye which affects vision.
- Should be handled with caution and kept away from young children and pets.
- Wearing long sleeves and eye protection is advised when handling and should be washed off immediately and thoroughly.
- In greenhouse situations pruning of large succulent spurges can produce vapours that can cause irritation. Precautions, including sufficient ventilation, are required.

### **Flowers**

- Look like a single flower but in fact the head has several flowers each reduced to its barest essential part required for reproduction.

- Are either male or female, with the female flower reduced to a pistil and the male to a stamen.
- The structure supporting the flowers have evolved to attract pollinators with nectar, shapes and colour that function as petals.

Euphorbia has been extensively hybridised for garden use, with many available in nurseries. Some have even hybridised naturally in the wild, e.g. *E. x martini* Rouy a cross of *E. amygdaloides* x *E. characias* subsp. *characias*, found in southern France.

I have tried to grow several Euphorbia in my garden and have found that many of the hybrids do not like our humid wet summers. I have grown *E. amygdaloides*, *E. x martini*, *E. characias* and its cultivars, *E. cyparissias*, *E. griffithii* and its cultivars and many others without success. However there are many beautiful Euphorbias that will grow very well in our climate. Below is a list of the ones that I have successfully grown in my garden:

### ***E. leucocephala***

Similar to this euphorbia are the much smaller Proven Winners *E. "Diamond Frost"*, *E. "Diamond Snow"*, *E. "Diamond Mountain"*



### ***E. pulcherrima* - poinsettia**



### ***E. bulbispina***



### ***E. tithymaloides* – Devil's Backbone**



### ***E. baioenci***

### ***E. trigona* – African milk tree**



**E. caput-medusae –  
Medusa's head**



**E. antisiphilitica –  
Candelilla**



**E. milii – Crown of  
Thorns**