

## TELEPHUS SPURGE

*Euphorbia telephioides* Chapman

**Synonyms:** *Galarhoeus telephioides* (Chapm.) Small; *Tithymalus telephioides* (Chapm.) Small

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae (spurge)

**FNAI Ranks:** G2/S2

**Legal Status:** US-Threatened FL-Endangered

**Wetland Status:** US-none+ FL-none



Flowering plant. © Kim Alexander

**Field Description:** Perennial **herb** with numerous, erect **stems** to 0.3 m tall. **Stems and leaves** smooth and fleshy with milky sap. **Leaves** 2.5-5 cm long, alternate, without **leaf stalks**, widest above the middle, usually with maroon midribs and margins. Plants may be male, female, or monoecious with male and female flowers occurring on the same plant. Both male and female **flowers** are held in reddish-green **cyathia** (cup-like structures). When monoecious, plants have 1 female flower with an ovary less than 1cm long and several male flowers one stamen each on short stalks, surrounded by 4 - 5 minute, petal-like glands. **Fruit** is a 3-lobed capsule subtended by a calyx-like structure.

**Similar Species:** Pineland spurge (*Euphorbia inundata*) is taller and bushier, with narrower leaves, and more flowers on longer stalks; it occurs in wetlands. Sandhill spurge (*Euphorbia exserta*), with dark maroon cyathia on long stalks, occurs in

## telephus spurge

*Euphorbia telephioides*

sandhills and flatwoods.

**Related Rare Species:** Wood spurge (*E. commutata*) occurs in Gadsden, Walton, Jackson, Levy and Marion counties and does not have the calyx-like structure subtending the capsule fruit as in telephus spurge. Scrub spurge (*E. roscens*) only occurs in Highlands county and has larger cyathia involucre. Pineland spurge (*E. pinetorum*) occurs only in south Florida in Miami-Dade county.

**Habitat:** Longleaf pine savannas, scrubby and mesic flatwoods, and coastal scrub on low sand ridges near the Gulf of Mexico.

**Best Survey Season:** Flowers and fruits April - September. Plants also seen in early fall, but this species rapidly declines and disappears during the fall months.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Endemic to the central panhandle of Florida in Bay, Gulf, and Franklin counties, and is only found within approximately four miles of the coast.

**Conservation Status:** Many populations occur on private timberlands, near roads, and utility rights-of-way, making them vulnerable to development and road building. Populations are most abundant on managed lands within St. Joe Bay Buffer State Preserve and Tyndall Air Force Base.

**Protection and Management:** Continued prescribed burning of historic flatwoods every 2-3 years should maintain open flatwoods habitat for telephus spurge.

**References:** Clewell 1985, Coile 2000, Federal Register 1992, Kral 1983, Tobe et al. 1998, USFWS 1994c, USFWS 2021, Weakley 2020.

telephus spurge

*Euphorbia telephioides*



Flower buds. © Kim Alexander



Vegetative plant. © Robert Gundy