

# SPURGE FAMILY ALBUM



## EUPHORBIACEAE

### Our “Flexibility” Is Our Success

In appearance the Euphorbiaceae or spurge family is one of the most diverse plant families. The members range from the familiar holiday poinsettia and flat weedy spurges to succulent cactus-like plants of arid regions of the Old World. Their often colorful bracts and strange forms have attracted growers and collectors worldwide.

Euphorbs are one of several plant groups known to exude a milky sap when the plant is injured. This latex is a source of natural rubber, and it is primarily harvested from the para rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*). Unfortunately, many people have allergic reactions to natural latex and must use alternative products.

Many euphorbs can't be consumed without dire results. It is no accident that the common name for the family, “spurge,” is related to the word “purge,” as those familiar with castor oil (from *Ricinus communis*) can attest. Surprisingly, one of the world's primary starch crops is manioc (*Manihot esculenta*), also known as cassava or tapioca. Before consumption, manioc must be thoroughly processed to remove cyanogenic glycoside compounds that would otherwise be converted into toxic cyanide during digestion. Nevertheless, a bowl of tapioca pudding is a true delight!



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