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Weed biocontrol: Lessons learned from leafy spurge

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Leafy spurge has been a difficult target for biocontrol. The problems are outlined and lessons learned in solving them are discussed. These are: 1) Start a project by identifying the damage-type most harmful to the weed and select an insect doing this type of damage from the literature. 2) Agents are best if from the climatic analogue of the release area, but others can often be adapted. 3) Have patience. Results of spurge control in Spruce Woods Park, Manitoba are discussed. 4) Use consortia for agent distribution and for funding overseas studies. 5) Introduce the agent from the population tested. 6) Lessons relating to the enabling legislation and the release approval process. Problems have reached a crisis point and unless changes are made biocontrol of weeds with native congeneric species, such as leafy spurge, will cease.