Leafy Spurge (Scientific name: *Euphorbia esula*)

Where to find it: Leafy spurge is most invasive in dry open rangeland, but may grow mixed in tallgrass prairies, brush, under trees, etc.

How to identify it: Plants are up to several dm (few feet) tall with milky sap, three-lobed seed pods, and yellow-green to yellow petal-like modified leaves (bracts) around the tiny flowers. Usually, many stems come from one point on the ground. The stems are a few mm (1/16 to 1/4 inch) in diameter and are usually little-branched (unless mowed) to near the top. There, they branch repeatedly to bear flowers.

Leafy spurge can form large solid patches in rangeland. From a distance, the patches are a distinctive vivid yellow-green color.

Looks like:

Before flowering, yellow toadflax looks similar. Toadflax does not have milky sap. From a distance, stands of sweetclover may mimic the yellow-green color. Up close, sweetclover will not match any of the characteristics for leafy spurge.
Spring & Summer

Young stems and leaves may be red or purplish. The leaves on the new stems are scale-like at first, gradually transitioning to their strap-like or oval shape. Mature leaves are a few to several cm (few inches) long and are slightly wavy along the margin. Leaves are usually bluish-green and "frosty", with a whitish layer you can rub off.

As the stems branch at the top, the leaves transition from their normal shape to shorter, wider, and more yellow, until they look like flower petals. The actual flowers are very tiny. Along the stem, leaves are alternate (only one leaf at each level of the stem, though they may be closely spaced). Around the flowers, the yellow petal-like leaves are usually paired.
In late summer under droughty conditions, the yellow-green color of stands may become reddish instead.

Autumn & Winter

The plants die down gradually to the base. They can turn varying degrees of red or yellow, depending on cold and dryness. The frosty-white surface of the leaves may not be evident this time of year.
In winter the dead, dry stems are wiry, somewhat brittle, usually with a few persisting leaves, and the characteristic branching mostly at the top.
Patches often grow so thickly there is no other vegetation, and the ground is bare between the stems, except for the fallen spurge leaves.