Hort Report November 2017

I like perennials that keep their leaves in the winter, and add a splash of color to shady spots in summer. One plant that looks great almost all winter long is Euphorbia amygdaloides, commonly known as wood spurge. The plant that I have brought today may be amygdaloides, or may be the similar species sequieriana; there are over 2000 Euphorbias, and as this was a gift, I’m not exactly sure which it is.

Euphorbias come in many forms, from 4 inches to 70 feet! Many are succulents, and most have a milky sap. All Euphorbias will cause severe discomfort if ingested, and the sap can irritate the skin. Some small tropical Euphorbias make excellent potted plants, and different varieties can often be seen exhibited at the Philadelphia Flower Show. Look for them in the Hamilton Hort Court next March.

Besides looking good in the garden, this plant can be cut and used as a filler in arrangements. Be sure to burn the bottom of the cut stems to seal in the sap; I use the flame from a candle. The reddish stems make a nice statement in a holiday arrangement.

 In the spring, the new growth of this cultivar has reddish leaves as well as stems. Each stem bears terminal cymes of cyathia and involucres, which pass for flowers. These cymes are yellow-green, which look great against the foliage. The whole plant is about two feet tall at this point. After a few months, when the ‘flowers’ fade, I cut them back. This plant spreads vigorously by underground runners, which are easy to pull up if it outgrows its space.

Euphorbia amygdaloides will grow well in dry soil, which makes it perfect for under trees.