



Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*)

Hydrilla is a rooted, submerged plant native to Southeast Asia. It was introduced to Florida during the late 1950s as an aquarium plant and now infests approximately 200 public water bodies. It is a rapidly growing plant that can grow up to one inch per day. It has the ability to fill lakes and rivers from the bottom to the surface with a tangled mass of stringy stems. Hydrilla has the demonstrated potential to fill a lake from shore to shore if not controlled.



Water Lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*)

Water lettuce is a free-floating plant. It was brought to Florida by early Spanish settlers of St. Augustine in the 1500s. It is present on 152 public waterways. Water lettuce reproduces and spreads rapidly, often covering significant portions of lakes and rivers.

How You Can Help

Keeping invasive plants under control is a challenging job. Aside from the District's efforts in managing thousands of acres of public waters, you can do your part in helping to stop the spread of invasive aquatic plants by:

- Learning what plants you should and should not plant in aquatic areas.
- Ensuring that all aquatic plant material is removed from your boat and trailer before and after launching your boat.
- Contacting the Invasive Plant Management Section of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (850) 245-2809 if you observe invasive plants on your private water body.

Prevention is the best way to fight invasive aquatic plants, so it's important that you get involved. For more information about the District's aquatic plant management program, treatment schedules and applicable water use restrictions, please visit WaterMatters.org/aquaticplants/.

Southwest Florida
Water Management District

WATERMATTERS.ORG · 1-800-423-1476

This information will be made available in accessible formats upon request.
Please contact the Communications Department at (352) 796-7211 or
1-800-423-1476 (FL only), ext. 4757; TDD only at 1-800-231-6103 (FL only).

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Weeding Out Invasive Aquatic Plants



Aquatic plants are a natural and important part of any lake, river or stream. They improve water quality by filtering pollutants, and they provide food and shelter for fish and wildlife. However, if native aquatic plant communities are replaced by invasive aquatic plants, the environment can be harmed, as can our enjoyment of these areas.

Invasive aquatic plants are nonnative plant species that live in or around water and spread on their own, causing environmental or economic harm. Pests, diseases and other environmental conditions that naturally limit the growth of invasive plants in their native lands are not present in Florida. Therefore, invasive aquatic plants spread rapidly and can become an environmental problem.

Maintaining Healthy Ecosystems

When large numbers of invasive aquatic plants accumulate, they can interfere with boat navigation, recreation and flood control, and may also decrease property values. Additionally, infestations of invasive aquatic plants can damage fish and wildlife habitat, significantly hinder fish management and habitat restoration efforts, and reduce oxygen levels in the water — increasing the potential for fish kills.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District's (District) goal is to maintain healthy ecosystems and preserve native plant populations. Many invasive species are well established and are extremely difficult and expensive to eliminate. Therefore, prevention is the best way to keep new invasive plants out of Florida's natural areas.

Managing Invasive Aquatic Plants

The District works with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to maintain healthy aquatic ecosystems through its aquatic plant management program.

Aquatic plant management operations are conducted using aquatic herbicides, mechanical harvesters and triploid grass carp, a weed-eating fish. The methods used depend on the plant species being targeted, the level of infestation, and the size of the water body and its primary use, among other factors. No single method is effective for all situations.

The District continuously monitors its rivers, lakes and streams to maintain invasive plant populations at low levels and minimize the number that must be treated. The District's aquatic plant management program primarily targets the troublesome, invasive species water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) and water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*). These attractive foreign species cause the most problems in our region and were introduced to Florida with no regard for their potential to cause ecological and economic harm.

The Worst Offenders



Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

Water hyacinth is a free-floating plant native to South America. It was introduced in Florida during the late 1880s. It currently infests more than 200 public water bodies in Florida and many more private waters. Water hyacinth has a fast growth rate, with populations able to double in as little as two weeks. Unmanaged waters typically become filled with dense, floating mats of water hyacinth.

