

Eurasian Watermilfoil

Myriophyllum spicatum

Iowa Aquatic Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Description: Eurasian watermilfoil is a submersed aquatic plant identified by long stems with feather-like leaves arranged in whorls of four around the stem. Each leaf is finely divided into 9 to 21 pairs of leaflets. Leaves are limp when removed from the water. Each stem usually branches several times as it reaches the water surface, forming a dense floating mat. The stems often turn red, especially towards the top of the plant. Spikes with small, reddish flowers rise above the water surface. Eurasian watermilfoil can reproduce through seeds, but it most often spreads by vegetative fragmentation. The native northern watermilfoil, with which it can be confused, usually has 5 to 9 pairs of leaflets, and the leaves are rigid out of water.



Distribution: Eurasian watermilfoil is native to Europe, Asia, and northern Africa. It was introduced into North America in the 1940's and has spread to 48 states and three Canadian provinces. The rapid spread of Eurasian watermilfoil across North America has been attributed mainly to boat traffic; plant fragments were accidentally transported from one lake to another on boats and trailers. Eurasian watermilfoil has been identified in twenty-eight waterbodies in Iowa, including the Mississippi River, and has been eradicated from most inland waters.

Threats: Eurasian watermilfoil is highly invasive and competes aggressively with native aquatic plants, thereby reducing diversity. A single fragment of stem or leaves can take root and form a new colony, and plants can grow up to 2 inches per day. Eurasian watermilfoil can grow in many types of waterbodies, as well as on almost any substrate. Since its growth is typically dense, Eurasian watermilfoil beds are poor fish spawning areas, and excessive cover may lead to populations of stunted fish. Dense surface mats can interfere with boating, fishing, swimming, and other forms of water recreation. It can also lower the value of lakefront property.

Control: Eurasian watermilfoil has no natural controls (insects, fungi, bacteria) to limit its growth and spread in Iowa. Therefore, control efforts focus on preventing the introduction of Eurasian watermilfoil into new waterbodies. Fragments of aquatic plants cling to boats, trailers, boating equipment (anchors, centerboards, fishing lines, bait bucket, etc.), and hunting equipment (decoy anchors, waders, etc.). If not removed, these fragments can start new populations when introduced into another waterbody. It is imperative to remove all vegetation and drain water from the livewell, bilge, transom well, and impeller before leaving water accesses. Empty bait buckets in the trash, and never release live bait into a waterbody or transfer aquatic animals or plants from one

Control (continued): waterbody to another. Wash/dry boats, trailers, and other equipment to kill harmful species that are not visible at the water access. Limiting the spread of Eurasian watermilfoil infestations and minimizing the impacts of infestations are much more difficult than preventing introductions. Problems caused by Eurasian watermilfoil infestations are managed with conventional methods such as treatment with herbicides or mechanical removal of plants.

Laws: Iowa law makes it illegal to 1) possess, introduce, purchase, sell, propagate, or transport aquatic invasive species in Iowa, 2) place a trailer or launch a watercraft with aquatic invasive species attached in public waters, and 3) operate a watercraft in a marked aquatic invasive species infestation. The scheduled fine is \$500 for violating any of the above regulations. The law also requires the DNR to identify waterbodies infested with aquatic invasive species and post signs alerting boaters. The DNR may restrict boating, fishing, swimming, and trapping in infested waters.

For more information about Eurasian watermilfoil or other aquatic invasive species, contact:



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