

IDENTIFICATION GUIDE:

Aquatic Weeds

fact sheet



Alligator weed with flowers



Alligator weed infestation (Photo: Paul Ferguson)



Removing "hitchhiker" aquatic weeds from boat trailers helps prevent them from spreading.

Types:

Alligator weed, Brazilian elodea, brittle naiad, coontail, creeping water primrose, feathered water fern, giant salvinia, *Hydrilla*, parrotfeather, and variable-leaf milfoil are some of the aquatic weeds commonly found in North Carolina

Description:

Aquatic weeds grow in, on, and around water. An aquatic weed is a plant that has become a nuisance by growing rapidly and displacing other plants. Just like their terrestrial relatives, aquatic weeds have roots, stems, leaves, flowers, and fruits. Positive identification is the first step when attempting to control an infestation.

Habitat:

Aquatic weeds are found in all types of waters, but tend to be more common in quiet, still waters such as ponds and coves. Aquatic weeds are separated into categories by the habitats in which they grow. An immersed plant is rooted underwater but grows above the water surface with leaves and stems above and below the surface. A submersed plant grows entirely under water but may send flowers and fruits above the surface. Floating plants are obvious and observed to freely float on the water surface. Most floating plants have roots that dangle in the water.

Significance:

Most aquatic weeds are a natural part of North Carolina's plant communities. They help prevent erosion and provide food and shelter for waterfowl, fish, and other aquatic wildlife. However, if weeds become dense mats, they deteriorate the habitat by displacing other organisms. Weed mats can even make boating, swimming, and other recreational activities virtually impossible. Dense mats also become breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which increases the risk of infectious diseases.

Most invasive aquatic weeds are not native to North Carolina and their occurrence is often associated with plant enthusiasts who buy, sell, and trade unusual and ornamental specimens. When these are released into open water, either intentionally or unintentionally, they cause an infestation and create an assortment of problems. Many times weeds are spread from one body to another by human activity. Proper permits are required to put any plant—native or non-native—in public waters.