

Eurasian Watermilfoil

Myriophyllum spicatum



[Alison Fox, University of Florida, Bugwood.org](#)



What is it and Why is it a Problem?

Eurasian Watermilfoil is a perennial aquatic plant that tends to take over parts of the lake where it establishes. It grows in thick dense mats in shallow waters (typically between 1 - 4 m deep but sometimes as deep as 10 m) with branches that reach the top of the water and form a canopy. As a result, native vegetation gets shaded out, fish spawning grounds become overcrowded and inaccessible, and biodiversity is lost. In addition, when Eurasian Watermilfoil dies and decomposes, it consumes dissolved oxygen from the water which degrades living conditions for fish and aquatic organisms, and can even cause massive fish-kills. Eurasian Watermilfoil directly affects humans by interfering with recreational activities such as swimming, fishing and boating. It also creates stagnant water which is preferred by breeding mosquitoes.

It is important to note that Eurasian Watermilfoil can hybridize with native Northern Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum sibiricum*) to create an even more aggressive form of the plant.



What Does it Look Like?

- Has a "feathery" appearance and usually grows between 6 - 9 feet tall under the water but can reach heights of up to 20 feet
- Leaves are green, arranged in whorls of 4 - 5 around the stem with 12 - 21 feathery leaflets per leaf, and hang limp when out of the water
- Stems branch off at the water surface and usually have thin reddish tips that thicken below the flowers
- Flowers are small, reddish-orange and located on 5 - 20 cm long spikes that stick out of the water in the late summer

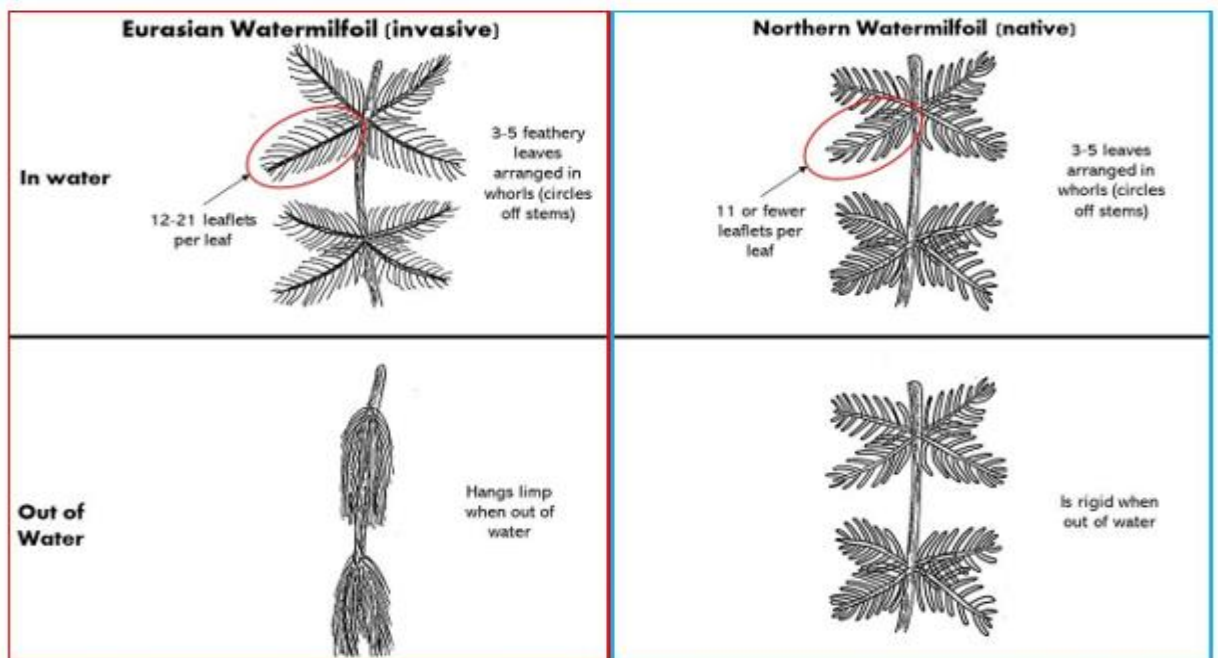


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE PHYSICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INVASIVE EURASIAN WATERMILFOIL AND NATIVE NORTHERN WATERMILFOIL. SOURCE: CARTER MARQUIS AND ANGELA VANDER EYKEN



How Can it be Managed?

- Report sightings of any invasive species online through [EDDMapS Ontario](#), a web-based mapping system which also has an app, or through the [Invasive Species in Ontario](#) project on [iNaturalist.org](#).
- Learn how to identify it so you can avoid accidentally spreading it with your fishing gear and equipment. Inspect your boat, trailer and fishing gear before leaving a fishing spot and before heading to a new fishing spot to remove any mud and plant fragments. Refer to the [OMNRF's Boater's Action Plan](#) for more information on cleaning your boat and gear.
- Avoid boating near known Eurasian Watermilfoil infestations and reduce your speed. Propellers can cut off pieces of the plant and spread them to new areas.
- Dispose of unused bait in the trash, rather than putting it in the lake. Some forms of bait may contain plant seeds or fragments that can be spread to your lake if released.
- Eurasian Watermilfoil can be controlled by hand harvesting (diving and pulling out plants manually, including the roots), but this will likely not eradicate the plant completely and must be done every 2-3 years in the summertime before the plant goes to flower. If you are considering removing any invasive aquatic plants, ensure you follow [OMNRF's rules](#) regarding removal - the beds of most water bodies in Ontario are Crown Land and thus likely require a permit.

- Do not buy, sell or plant Eurasian Watermilfoil for water garden or pond use. This plant can look similar to native Northern Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum sibiricum*) but only has 11 or fewer leaflets which are rigid when out of the water. Eurasian Watermilfoil also looks similar to invasive Parrot Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) but this plant has not been recorded in the wild in Ontario. You can refer to the [Grow me instead: Guide to Planting Native Plants in Southern Ontario](#) to determine what native aquatic plants to use instead of Eurasian Watermilfoil. Oftentimes invasive aquatic plants end up reaching water bodies when people dispose of their unwanted aquarium or water garden plants. The correct way to dispose of unwanted aquatic plants is to donate them or throw them in the garbage. They can also be composted or mulched 30 m or more away from a watercourse on land.

References

[Great Lakes Nonindigenous Species Information System](#), produced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Grow Me Instead \(Southern Ontario\) Brochure](#), produced by the Ontario Invasive Plant Council

[Invasive Aquatic Plant Species: A Quick Reference Guide](#), produced by Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program and Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

[Ontario Invading Species Awareness Program](#), developed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH).