



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Weed Alert

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLANT?

Eurasian water milfoil

(*Myriophyllum spicatum*)



Stems are densely branched forming a dense canopy.
Photo: Alison Fox, University of Florida, www.forestryimages.org

INTRODUCTION

Eurasian water milfoil is a highly aggressive and invasive submerged aquatic weed that can spread rapidly. It forms a dense cover that shades out and replaces all other aquatic plants, seriously affecting native plant and animal life. Dense mats also interfere with water sports and irrigation.

It has the potential to become a major weed of dams, lakes and reservoirs in Australia.

Eurasian water milfoil prefers lakes, ponds, shallow reservoirs and slow moving water, but will grow in fast moving water. It can tolerate and thrive over a range of temperatures and water conditions, including low levels of salinity.

WORLD STATUS

This water milfoil is native to Europe, Asia and northern Africa. It is now naturalised and a major weed of lakes and reservoirs in Canada and the USA. It is also considered to be a weed in its native range.

This species has not been recorded as present in Australia.

IDENTIFICATION

Eurasian water milfoil is a submerged perennial herb. Stems are rooted at the base and grow towards the surface. It can grow in water from 0.5 to 10 m deep, but most commonly at depths up to 3 m deep.



Leaves are featherlike and whorled around the stem.
Photo: © Ian Dodkins, www.habitas.org.uk/flora

Stems

Hairless slender stems grow to 7 m long and 5 mm thick. They are reddish-brown to whitish-pink in colour and branch profusely near the surface to form a dense canopy.

Leaves

Leaves are usually submerged, olive-green in colour, less than 4 cm long and feather-like. They are arranged around the stem in whorls of four and have 5–24 pairs of divisions (usually more than 12).

Flowers

Small, pinkish, four-petalled flowers occur in whorls of four around the stem. They are held above the water in an erect spike up to 8 cm tall but then lie parallel to the water surface once fruit sets.

GROWTH AND SPREAD

Plants mostly spread as vegetative fragments. During the growing season plants automatically fragment, often developing roots before they separate from the parent plant. Water movement and human activities may also cause fragmentation.

Fragments are spread over long distances by water currents and are mainly dispersed between water bodies by boating and fishing activities.

Eurasian water milfoil may die back to the base during winter and reshoots in spring.

CONTROL

Control of Eurasian water milfoil is difficult. Mechanical harvesting can lead to rapid reinfestation due to the plant being fragmented artificially.

In dams and reservoirs where the water levels are under manual control, water level manipulation can be successful. Raising water levels 'drowns' the plant and lowering levels 'dehydrates' it.

WATCH OUT FOR AND REPORT ANY FORM OF EURASIAN WATER MILFOIL.

Myriophyllum spicatum is a Class 1 noxious weed throughout NSW under the NSW *Noxious Weeds Act 1993*. As such, the weed must be eradicated from the land and the land kept free of the plant. As a notifiable weed, all outbreaks must be reported to the local council within three days.

If you have seen this plant, please report it to your Council Weeds Officer or NSW Department of Primary Industries for positive identification.



Flower spike.
Photo: John Somerville, UK

REFERENCES

- Aiken, S.G., Newroth, P.R. and Wile, I. (1979) The biology of Canadian weeds. 34. *Myriophyllum spicatum* L. *Canadian Journal of Plant Science* 59: 201–215.
- Hosking, J. R., Sainty, G., Jacobs, S. and Dellow, J. (in prep.) *The Australian WEEDbook*.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Contact your local council weeds officer or district agronomist, or telephone the NSW Department of Primary Industries Hotline on 1800 680 244

