EXOTIC, INVASIVE PLANTS IN ILLINOIS HABITATS

AQUATIC AREAS: Wetlands, Lakes, Streams, Rivers, Marshes...

MAP KEY: ■ = Widespread  ■ = Occassional / Rare  ■ = Absent

For more information on invasive plants visit the Illinois CAPS website at: www.inhs.uiuc.edu/research/CAPS/
EXOTIC, INVASIVE PLANTS IN ILLINOIS WETLANDS

Wetlands are important habitat types in Illinois for wildlife as well as protecting against flooding and recharging groundwater sources. Development and land-use change in Illinois has left natural wetlands as a rare habitat type; less that 10% of pre-settlement wetlands still exist. Much of it has been converted to urban and agriculture uses or dammed for creating lakes and other engineering projects.

Eurasian Watermilfoil (Myriophyllum spicatum L.): Perennial. Native to: Eurasia and northern Africa. Distribution: Still or slow moving water, but occasionally in faster moving water of streams and rivers. Thrives in shallow water with ample light penetration. ID Keys: Submersed plant with stems up to 12’ long. Usually only immersed when flowering or water level low. Leaves are finely dissected with a whorled arrangement around stem. Spreads by rhizomes or fragmentation. Importance: Impedes water flow and displaces natural aquatic vegetation.

Curlyleaf Pondweed (Potamogeton crispus): Perennial. Native to: Eurasia. Distribution: Found floating or submerged in shallow waters of lakes, streams, rivers, reservoirs, ditches, and marshes. ID Keys: Leaves are smooth, alternate, and elliptical, 1/2” wide and 2 to 3” long. Leaf margins are wavy and have a prominent midrib. Importance: Inhibits water flow in drainage or irrigation ditches and canals; hybridizes with native species.

Hydrilla (Hydrilla verticillata): Perennial. Native to: Africa, Asia, and Australia. Distribution: Found at depths of up to 20’ or more of fresh, slow-moving, or still water. ID Keys: Submerged plant with leaves whorled around stem in groups of 3 to 8. Leaves 5/8” long and very narrow, directly attached to stem, margins are slightly toothed. Importance: Federal Noxious Weed. Forms a dense, mat-like stand that not only outcompetes native vegetation, but also destroys fish & wildlife habitat and acts as a breeding ground for mosquitoes; may cause water flow impediment and subsequent flooding.

Alligator Weed (Alternanthera philoxeroides): Perennial. Native to: South America. Distribution: Grows over still water and on wet banks; can withstand some salinity and some extended immersion in flooded conditions. ID Keys: Stems are smooth and can be single or branched. Leaves are opposite, attached to stem, waxy, lanceolate, 1 1/2 to 4 1/2” long, and 1/2 to 1” wide with entire margins. Importance: Forms a dense mat over the surface of lakes, ponds, and canals restricting light to animals and plants below, thus altering water temperatures and oxygen content. Creates an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Water Hyacinth (Eichhornia crassipes): Perennial. Native to: South America. Distribution: Prefers still and slow moving waters where it can put down roots in sediments. ID Keys: Floating plant with thick, glossy, round leaves (4 1/2” wide), inflated leaf stems, and very showy lavender flowers; can grow to 16” tall. Importance: Forms a carpeted layer from shore to shore of slow moving or still waters, preventing native plants from germinating and growing, reducing habitats for most native fish and aquatic animals.

Watercress (Nasturtium officinale, N. microphyllum): Perennial. Native to: Europe and central Asia. Distribution: Gently flowing water in or near lakes, streams, rivers. ID Keys: Floating, leafy plants with hollow stems; 4 to 18” tall. Leaves are pinnately compound. Produces small white and green flowers in clusters. Importance: Becomes dense and can impede water flow, prevent native vegetation from growing, and reduce habitat.

Brazilian Elodea (Egeria densa): Perennial. Native to: South America (Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay). Distribution: Fresh water lakes & ponds and slow moving streams. ID Keys: Leaves (3 to 8) whorled, range in size from 1/2 to 1 1/2” long and 1/8 to 1/5” wide, often curved downward. Plants have lots of adventitious roots and heavily laterally branched. Importance: Dense mats restrict water flow, trap sediment, and impede recreational use of waterways; also will reduce light and out-compete native plants.

Flowering rush (Butomus umbellatus): Perennial. Native to: Europe. Distribution: Emergent plant along shorelines or submerged plant in lakes and rivers. ID Keys: Green triangular stems up to 3’ tall (similar to bulrush). Leaves are limp under water; above the surface they are spirally twisted. Umbrella shaped cluster of flowers that are whitish pink (only flowers in shallow water or dry sites). Importance: Crowds out native plants, forms dense stands which interfere with recreational lake use and reduces habitat.

Reed Canarygrass (Phalaris arundinacea): Perennial. Native to: Eurasia. Distribution: Wetlands including marshes, wet prairies, wet meadows, fens, stream banks, and swales. Quite common in the northern part of the state where it frequently occurs in wet meadows and marshes. ID Keys: Grass that grows 2 to 6’ tall. Erect hairless stems with leaf blades are 1/4 to 1/3” wide, gradually tapering, up to 10” long. Distinct transparent ligule (a membrane where blade and sheath meet). Densely clustered green to purple changing to beige flowers from May to mid-June. Importance: It has been planted widely for forage and for erosion control. Out competes native species by forming dense stands. Invasion associated with disturbance.

Purple Loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria L.): Perennial. Native to: Eurasia. Distribution: Found in wetlands, pond edges, streambanks, canals, and ditches. ID Keys: Herbaceous plant that grows up to 6’ tall. Leaves are lanceolate 2 to 5” long and may have some small hairs. They are opposite or whorled around branching stems. Pinkish purple to red flower spikes. Importance: Commonly planted as ornamental; displaces natural vegetation and wildlife.

Invasive plants have the ability to thrive and spread aggressively outside of their natural range. While some invasive plants tend to be more aggressive than others, it remains equally important to be able to correctly identify and manage the invasive plant before it begins to cause damage to the ecosystem, humans, or animals.

What can you do? Inspect and clean boats and equipment before leaving the water area. Use native plant species around home and in aquatic areas. Be aware of plants rapidly spreading or increasing in number and identify them if unknown. If they are invasive, seek advice on determining the best strategy for removal. Not all plants can be removed the same way, so be sure to ask questions on how to specifically remove the invasive plant you have.

Please visit our website at www.inhs.uiuc.edu/research/CAPS/ or email invasives@inhs.uiuc.edu for more information on invasives.