

Eurasian Watermilfoil

Myriophyllum spicatum



FAMILY	Haloragidaceae- Watermilfoil	ORIGIN	Eurasia, Australia, Africa
LIFE CYCLE	Perennial	OTHER NAMES	Spiked watermilfoil

QUICK FACTS

- Eurasian watermilfoil is an invasive aquatic perennial that has adapted to grow in a variety of conditions. It grows underwater and has green, feather-like leaves whorled around a thin stem about 10 feet long.
- Native to Eurasia and Northern Africa, this weed is also considered **invasive in its native range** because it prevents other aquatic vegetation from growing. Although some small aquatic creatures use this as cover, it is hardly ever eaten or used by fish.
- Eurasian watermilfoil can spread by **seed, rhizomes, and root or stem fragments**. This plant can regrow from small plant debris that is usually spread by human recreational activities. It creates thick root mats and a dense canopy that **shades out other plants** and prevents them from establishing in infected areas.

An invasive aquatic plant worldwide in nearly all bodies of water.

Eurasian watermilfoil was spread throughout the U.S. by contaminated boating equipment, the aquarium trade, and waterfowl. It was initially discovered in New Mexico in 1966 in the Gila National Forest and has since been reported in several lakes and waterways, with the most recent report in 2023 in Sierra County. Once introduced to an area, this weed is nearly impossible to eradicate. It threatens native aquatic plants, provides inadequate cover for animals, and often creates habitat for disease-carrying insects.

What does it look like?

Eurasian watermilfoil grows entirely underwater. It has thin stems that can be green, brown, or pinkish white. The stems grow up to 20 feet tall and get thinner the farther they are from the main stem. Leaves grow in a whorled pattern in groups of 4 or 5 with 28-48 thread-like leaflets. They can usually be found in fresh, calm waters around 3-20 feet deep, but can also be found in other aquatic locations.



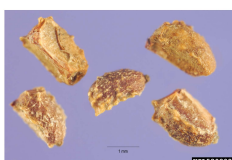
Graves Lovell, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bugwood.org



Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org



Exner Tamás, Inaturalist.org



Steve Hurst, USDA NRCS PLANTS Database, Bugwood.org

Plant: Eurasian watermilfoil grows underwater, usually at depths of 3-10 feet, but can be found in waters as deep as 20 feet. Its stems are smooth, thin, and green, brown, or pinkish-white. Leaves usually float directly underneath the surface and create thick cover. The tops of leaves and stems can sometimes turn reddish.

Roots: Roots are rhizomatous, thin and white, forming dense clumps beneath plants. Roots are usually fragile and easily break, but plants can regrow from root fragments.

Leaves: Leaves are green, feather-like, and grow in a whorled pattern around stems in groups of 4-5. Each leaf is about an inch long and has 28-48 leaflets that become limp when removed from water.

Flowers: Around 2 to 3 inches in diameter, purple to deep rose, rarely white. Behind the flower, there are needle-like bracts that connect to the stem.

Seeds: 1/8 to 3/16 inches long, shiny, striated, yellow-brown, with a hairlike plume. Each flower can produce up to 10,000 seeds, of which 33% are viable, yielding 3,600.

Impact and Management

Ecosystem Health

Once established, Eurasian watermilfoil displaces native plants, resulting in a notable loss of floral and faunal biodiversity. It provides inadequate cover for most aquatic animals and removes nutrients from other plants that are not returned to the soil unless the plant dies entirely. Weed creates monocultures by shading out other plants and forming thick mats that prevent them from establishing. Additionally, weeds readily hybridize with other water species, producing more weeds that continue to outcompete native plants.



Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Prevention is the most important way of preventing this weed from infecting new areas. Once established, Eurasian watermilfoil is considered nearly impossible to eradicate. Prevention includes clearing water equipment of any aquatic plant debris after use. Stems and roots are often found on boat propellers, trailers, and fishing nets. Monitoring, mapping, and reporting early infestations is important to prevent further spread. Throw this debris in the trash to avoid spreading it to new bodies of water. This weed is tolerant to most mechanical removal methods, and mechanical methods often encourage the weed to grow more vigorously. Some biological and chemical control methods may be effective in managing the weed, but eradicating it once established is nearly impossible.

DO's

- Clean boating equipment of any aquatic plant debris to avoid spreading to new waters.
- Monitor and report weed sightings, as early detection can prevent their spread and possibly allow eradication.
- Dispose of plant debris appropriately to prevent plant fragments from resprouting in new areas.

DON'Ts

- Intentionally plant in aquariums or other bodies of water.
- Allow it to spread to new bodies of water. Avoid spreading plant debris by cleaning equipment.
- Do not break up the plant unnecessarily, as Eurasian watermilfoil can regrow from stem and root fragments.



For more information on managing Eurasian watermilfoil, please visit www.nmweeds.org

