



Golden Sands
Resource Conservation
& Development Council, Inc.



Aquatic Invasive Species Quick Guide

Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

Description: Water hyacinth is a distinctive, free-floating plant known for its inflated leaf stalks and brightly colored flowers. The leaves and stalks are glossy and smooth to the touch. The spongy, inflated bases of the leaves help the plant float. A mass of dark, densely packed roots hangs beneath the plant, absorbing nutrients directly from the water. Water hyacinth can produce 8-15 large flowers which occur on a single spike. The flowers have 6 petals and are purple to white with a yellow spot on the top petal. The fruit is an enclosed capsule containing three seeds.



Water hyacinth has thick and spongy leaf stalks, allowing it to float on water.

Photo: Paul Skawinski



The flowers are produced on a spike and are purple-white with a yellow spot.

Photo: Chris Hamerla

North American Distribution: Water hyacinth has been documented in the southern U.S., along both coastlines, and occasionally in the Great Lakes region.

Dispersal Vector(s): Water hyacinth was first introduced to the United States as an ornamental water garden plant from South America in 1884. It often spreads to new locations through illegal dumping of water garden plants/animals. It reproduces by seeds and vegetative stolons. Many young plants can remain attached to the parent plant until they are separated by either wind or physical damage. This allows water hyacinth to form large, dense mats.

Ecological Impact: Water hyacinth can form large colonies that can clog waterways, preventing boating, fishing, and other water activities. These plant mats block sunlight from reaching submergent plants below, and create stagnant water conditions that attract mosquitoes. Water hyacinth is problematic for wildlife as it impairs animals from moving across the surface of the water.

Control Options: Manual removal by hand or machine is a simple and cost effective control for Water Hyacinth when dealing with small infestations. Because the plant floats and usually is not rooted into sediments, the removal of the plant is relatively easy. Hand removal should be done as soon as possible to minimize the chance of seed production.

Herbicides can also be used to remove water hyacinth. Plants should be treated with an herbicide approved for aquatic use to minimize harm to amphibians and other aquatic organisms.

A biological control for water hyacinth has been used on large infestations when an herbicide application is not desirable. Two weevil species, *Neochetina eichhorniae* and *Neochetina bruchi*, have been successful at reducing water hyacinth. The insects lay their eggs on the enlarged stalks of the plant and the larvae tunnel through. The open wounds invite infection by bacteria and fungi, which can stress or kill the plants.



Water hyacinth can quickly form large, dense mats that crowd out native aquatic plants.

Photo: Paul Skawinski

Additional Information:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/plants/weeds/hyacinth.html>

<https://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/uploadedFiles/moretonbay/environment/vegetation/water-hyacinth.pdf>

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/141>

<http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=EICR>

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