

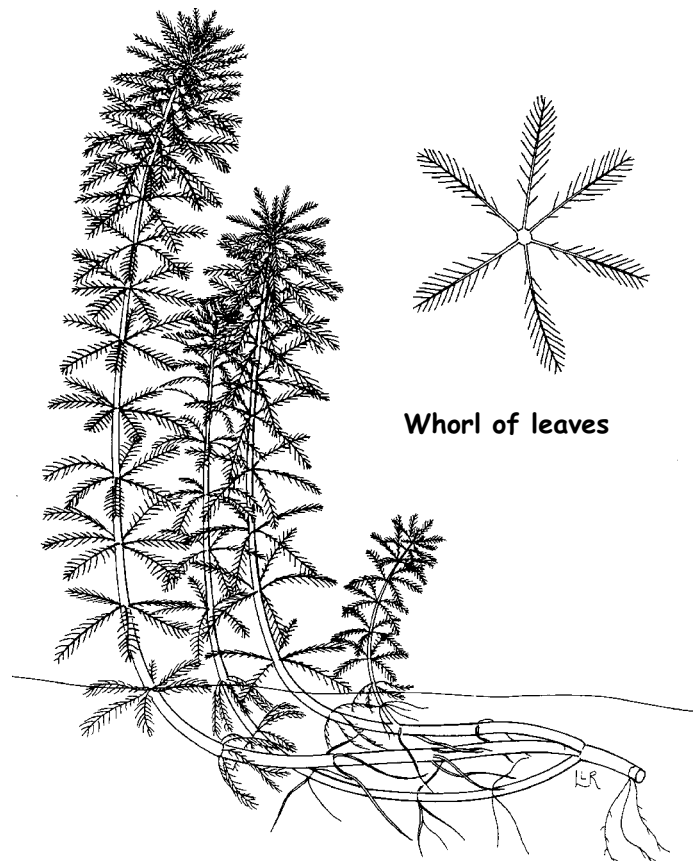
Vermont Invasive Exotic Plant Fact Sheet

Parrot-feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum* (Vell.) Verdc. Watermilfoil Family Vermont Class A Noxious Weed

Description: Parrot-feather is a perennial aquatic plant with both submersed and emersed leaves. The stems rarely branch and emersed leaves sometimes trail along mud or seepage areas. Emersed leaves are grey-green, rather stiff and arranged in whorls of 4 to 6 around the stem. The finely divided leaves give the plant a feathery appearance. Submersed leaves are limp and often appear to be decaying. The flowers are white or pinkish. In North America, parrot-feather reproduces exclusively by plant fragments. No seeds are produced.

Habitat: Parrot-feather can be found in lakes, ponds, rivers, canals, and drainage ditches. It tends to colonize slowly moving or still waters and is well adapted to moderate water level fluctuations. Under natural conditions, parrot-feather appears to prefer muddy banks and shallow water to about 7 feet (2 meters) in depth. It has the ability to survive in coastal areas where salt intrusions may occur and can grow to the exclusion of other aquatic plant species that are not as salt tolerant. Parrot-feather is reported to be hardy to -26°F (-32°C). When emersed plants are killed by low winter temperatures, plants may still be able to grow from submerged stems the following spring. Because of its attractive foliage and ease of cultivation, parrot-feather is widely used as an indoor aquarium plant as well as in ornamental aquatic landscapes outdoors.

Threats: Parrot-feather has not been reported to be a serious pest in North America. However, it can grow luxuriantly if conditions are favorable and it has the potential to cause localized problems. It is considered to be a nuisance in Japan and South Africa where it clogs rivers, water supplies, farm ponds, and irrigation channels.



Whorl of leaves

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Distribution: Parrot-feather is native to South America. It now occurs on every continent (excluding Antarctica) as a result of introductions made through the aquarium/horticultural trade. It first appeared in the U.S. in New Jersey in the late 1800s. Other early populations in the Northeast were found in New York and Pennsylvania. Populations of parrot-feather are now found in most of the Southeastern states and all along the Gulf coastal plain.

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Parrot-feather

Watermilfoil Family (*Haloragaceae*)

Distribution continued: It also occurs in Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington in the West. There is some speculation that the northeastern populations of parrot-feather have not persisted for long periods of time due to low winter temperatures. However, the plant was recently reported to have overwintered in northeastern Vermont in an ornamental setting consisting of outdoor tanks. Parrot-feather has not yet been found growing in the wild in Vermont.

Control: Parrot-feather control has been attempted through the use of aquatic herbicides and mechanical harvesting, although these methods have not always been successful. The herbivorous Asian fish, grass carp, dislikes the tough stems of parrot-feather. **(Introduction of grass carp in Vermont is illegal because of the negative effects they could have on natural fish and wildlife populations, the possibility of their establishment or spread to other waters, and the possible transmission of diseases to resident fish populations.)** There are several insects that feed on parrot-feather; however, little work has been done to determine if insect biological controls can be used successfully. Fungal pathogens are currently being tested.

* No person may use pesticides, biological controls, bottom barriers, structural controls or powered mechanical devices in waters of the state to control nuisance aquatic vegetation, insects or other aquatic life including lamprey unless that person has been issued a permit by the secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources.

References:

- Nelson, Edward N. and R. W. Couch. 1985. *History of the Introduction and Distribution of Myriophyllum aquaticum in North America*. In: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Watermilfoil and Related Haloragaceae Species. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Sutton, David L. 1985. *Biology and Ecology of Myriophyllum aquaticum*. In: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Watermilfoil and Related Haloragaceae Species. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.



For more information about Vermont's invasive exotic plant species or if you would like to know how you can help, please contact:

The Nature Conservancy of Vermont, 27 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602
Tel: 802-229-4425

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, 103 S. Main St., Bldg. 10 North,
Waterbury, VT 05671-0408 Tel. 802-241-3777



Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, 103 S. Main St., Bldg. 10 South, Waterbury, VT
05671-0501 Tel. 802-241-3715

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, 103 S. Main St., Bldg. 10 South,
Waterbury, VT 05671-0601 Tel. 802-241-3678