

Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM)

Common characteristics

- Submersed, rooted aquatic plant in shallow waters (less than 30 feet deep)
- Long branching stems near the surface with soft, feathery leaves
- Leaves usually attached in whorls of four, but sometimes 3-5
- Each leaf has 10-21 pairs of leaflets
- Leaflets are usually closely-spaced
- Leaves are limp when out of water
- Top of plants often turn red
- Small reddish flowers in mid-summer
- Plants can grow up to 15 feet long

Often mistaken for Northern watermilfoil (native)

- Plant does not branch at surface
- Leaves attached to stem in groups of 4 (rarely 5)
- Each leaf has 5-9 pairs of leaflets
- Leaflets are widely-spaced
- Leaves are rigid when out of water

Concerns

Eurasian watermilfoil chokes out native aquatic plants, decreasing the habitat for native fish species. These thick mats and tangled stems also limit recreational fun; boating, swimming, and fishing. EWM can also reduce property values and under severe conditions increase costs to keep boat channels open and maintenance on boats can occur. It has also been shown to significantly increase permanent pool mosquitoes.

Growth and Reproduction

EWM can be spread by the fragmentation of the plants. This will happen when mechanically clearing aquatic plants from beaches, docks, and landings. These events can create thousands of new stem fragmentations. It only takes one segment of stem and leaves to take root and form a new colony. Removing native vegetation creates the perfect habitat for this invader. Not checking boats, trailers, and any water related equipment; such as tubes, anchors, ropes, etc can spread EWM from one lake to another.

Native distribution and Minnesota distribution

Eurasian watermilfoil was accidentally introduced to North America from Europe. It was most likely introduced to North America through the aquarium trade in the 1940s. It would have entered the waters due to aquarium owners releasing the contents of their aquariums into local water bodies. It flourished in these local waterbodies and spread westward by clinging to recreational watercrafts. The first infestation in MN was reported in 1987 by people using Lake Minnetonka. It currently occupies over 120 water bodies throughout the state.