Identification of
Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)

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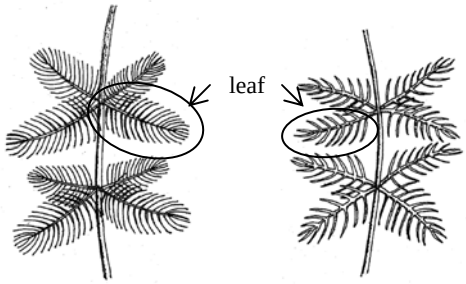
EXTENSION

Eurasian watermilfoil is native to Europe, Africa, and Asia. It may have been first introduced through ship ballast water into Chesapeake Bay in the 1800s. Introductions to western U. S. may have been intentional to improve fish habitat, by its use as an aquarium plant or as fresh packing material for worms. Its range now includes much of the U. S.



Leaf of Eurasian watermilfoil (left) and native Northern watermilfoil (right) showing leaf segments

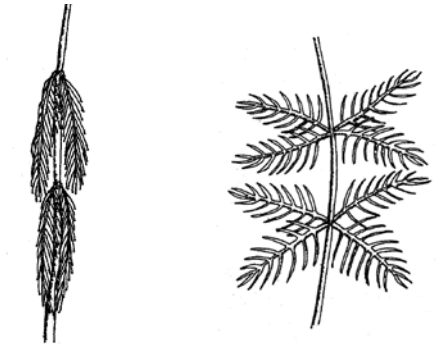
Identification

Eurasian watermilfoil can be distinguished from the common, native Northern milfoil (*Myriophyllum sibericum)** using the following two attributes:

1) most Eurasian watermilfoil leaves have 12-21 pairs of segments (most leaves of the native Northern watermilfoil have less than 12 pairs of segments) AND
2) leaves of Eurasian watermilfoil hang limp against the stem when out of water like a closed umbrella (native Northern watermilfoil leaves are rigid when out of water; standing nearly straight out from the stem like an open umbrella)

Habitat

Eurasian watermilfoil is a submersed, rooted aquatic plant. It typically grows in water 3 to 15 feet (1 to 4.5 meters) deep, but can grow in depths of up to 30 feet (9 meters) of water if light is sufficient. It grows in rocky, mucky, or sandy bottoms, but does best in fine textured, inorganic sediment where it can shade out native plants and gain a competitive edge.



Out of water, Eurasian watermilfoil leaves hang limp against the stem (left); those of native Northern watermilfoil are rigid (right)

Life cycle

Eurasian watermilfoil grows quickly in cool water early in the spring, reaching up to 15 feet in length. In low light and high temperatures, it forms a dense surface mat.

In mid-summer, flowers are produced on stems that reach the water surface. The flower stalks extend above the water surface. Seeds produced from these flowers are dispersed by water currents, but are not the primary vector of dispersal.

Its primary means of spreading is by small stem fragments created when disturbed or when it naturally breaks up following fruit production. These fragments readily root and produce new plants under favorable conditions.

Eurasian watermilfoil does *not* produce small reproductive buds (called turions) that are produced by several native watermilfoils.

* Note: there are several species of native milfoils occurring in Minnesota that are less common.