

Water Hyacinth



Sponge-like nodules at the base of the water hyacinth leaves give the plant buoyancy

‘Toss it in!’ Simple to follow directions when adding a water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) to the water garden. It also requires plenty of sun and warm water to flourish. It is an annual in colder climates.

Sponge-like nodules at the base of the plants give it buoyancy and support the shiny green leaves. Clusters of lilac-blue flowers with yellow eyes bloom on six-inch spikes that rise above the foliage. Water hyacinth plays several important roles in the water garden. It grows long feathery roots that dangle in the water sucking up nutrients for nourishment while serving as spawning media for goldfish and shelter for the fry.



Water hyacinth flowers are lilac-blue with yellow eyes

New plants form on runners or stolons. These new plantlets can quickly form a dense colony that provides cover and shade for fish and slows algae growth. Before the summer is over, thinning will probably be necessary. Share your extra plants with others or dispose of properly. **Never place in a natural body of water. It is ILLEGAL.**

Water hyacinth is native to the Amazon River basin in South America. It has naturalized worldwide in warm climate countries. It keeps sunlight from reaching the native submerged vegetation and overruns indigenous aquatic plant species important to wildlife. Outside its native range, it is considered an invasive weed and is a prohibited plant in most of those countries. It is not prohibited in the entire United States but is in many states. In Minnesota it is listed as a regulated invasive plant. That means it can be bought, sold and possessed but it cannot be placed in a natural body of water. In Wisconsin, water hyacinth is a prohibited plant.

Water hyacinth was introduced to the United States in 1884 at the Cotton States Exhibition in New Orleans, LA. Plants were given away at the event. Just how they made their way into the waterways of the Gulf Coast states is unknown but it is not considered to be malicious. The ones that found their way to the warm waters multiplied quickly.

To eradicate/control, physical, biological and chemical methods are used but with modest success. Back in 1910 another idea made headlines – hippopotamus ranching. It was proposed as a way to solve two problems: a meat shortage and the ecological-crises caused by rapidly spreading water hyacinth. Hippos would eat the water hyacinth and we would dine on their meat.

Louisiana Congressman Robert Broussard introduced the American Hippo Bill (H.R. 23261) that asked the Federal government for \$250,000 to import African hippos to the swamps and bayous of his state. It failed by just a few votes.