Eurasian watermilfoil

Myriophyllum spicatum

Kingdom: Plantae
Division/Phylum: Anthophyta - flowering plants

Features

Eurasian watermilfoil is a submersed vascular plant that may be 10 feet tall. Its reddish to olive green stems can reach the surface in up to 20 feet of water. Mature leaves usually are arranged in whorls of four. Each feather-like leaf is finely divided into 12 to 21 paired leaflets. Leaves rarely extend above the surface and collapse when removed from the water. Tiny red flowers grow on stalks.

Natural History

Eurasian watermilfoil originates from Europe and Asia, but was introduced to North America through the aquarium industry sometime between the late 1800s and the early 1940s. It is found in shallow bays and along the shoreline. It grows in many types of lakes, as well as on almost any lake bottom type (silty, sandy, or rocky). It flowers June through August. It forms dense beds that can limit the recreational use of a lake, reduce the availability of fish spawning grounds, outcompete native plants, and alter a lake's natural environment. In the late summer and fall, the plants become brittle and naturally break apart. Each fragment is capable of growing roots and developing into a new plant. Fragments clinging to boats and trailers can spread the plant to other waters. In 1996, Iowa legislation was passed making it illegal to transport Eurasian watermilfoil on a public road, place a trailer or launch a watercraft with Eurasian watermilfoil attached in public waters, or operate a watercraft in a marked Eurasian watermilfoil area. The law requires the DNR to identify bodies of water with infestations and post signs alerting boaters.

Habitats

constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes

Iowa Status

common; exotic

Iowa Range

northern Iowa and Ringgold County

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.