Weed alert

Water-hyacinth

(Eichhornia crassipes)

A beautiful flower, but a major invasive weed species since the late 1890s.

Water-hyacinth

This native of South America is now considered a major weed species in more than 50 countries. The floating water-hyacinth was introduced into Florida in the 1880s and covered more than 120,000 acres of public lakes and navigable rivers by the early 1960s. Since then, intensive management efforts coordinated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have reduced water-hyacinth to approximately 2,000 acres statewide.

The growth rate of water-hyacinth is among the highest of any known plant. In Florida, water-hyacinth populations can double their size in as little as two weeks by sending off short runner stems that develop new plants (daughter plants). Water-hyacinth also has the ability to reproduce by seeds.

Why water-hyacinth must be managed:

Water-hyacinth blocks waterways and limits boat traffic, recreation, flood control and wildlife use. By producing a dense canopy at the water surface, this exotic pest plant shades out native submersed plant species and can uproot native emergent species that are important to wildlife.

Dense water-hyacinth mat in a Florida waterway.

Environmental damage caused by water-hyacinth populations:

- Water-hyacinth mats lower dissolved-oxygen concentrations, damaging fish populations.
- One acre of water-hyacinth can deposit as much as 500 tons of rotting plant material on the bottom of a waterway yearly.
- Water-hyacinth mats can increase flooding in rivers and canals by forming dams.
- Water-hyacinth mats provide ideal breeding environments for mosquitoes.
- Water-hyacinth populations decrease biodiversity in Florida.

Because of its aggressive growth rate, water-hyacinth is illegal to possess in Florida without a special permit.

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Synonymy: Eichhornia speciosa, Piaropus crassipes, Piaropus mesomelas, Pontederia crassipes, Heteranthera formosa.

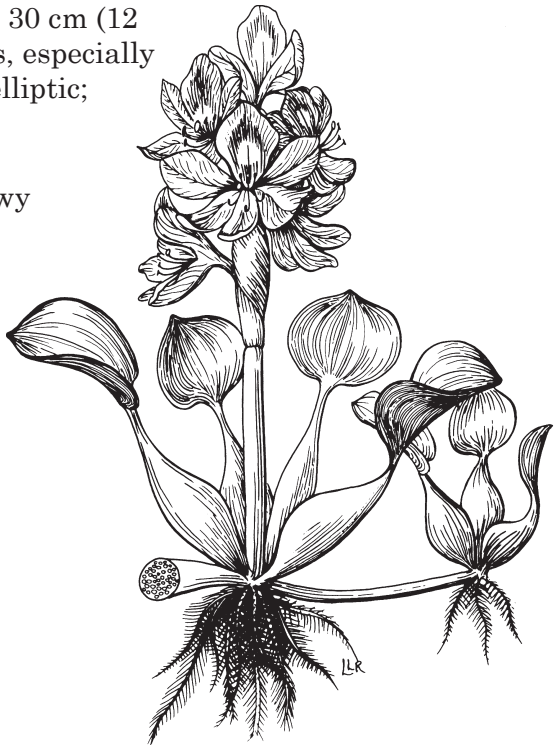
Water-hyacinth *(Eichhornia crassipes)*

Water-hyacinth is a floating plant that has clusters of leaves with spongy stalks arising from a base of dark purple feathery roots. The leaf clusters are often linked by smooth horizontal stems (called stolons). Linked plants form dense rafts in the water and mud.

Leaves: leaves formed in rosettes; petioles to 30 cm (12 in.) or more, spongy, usually inflated or bulbous, especially near the base; leaf blades roundish or broadly elliptic; glossy green to 15 cm (6 in.) wide.

Flowers: single spike of several (8 to 15) showy flowers above rosette, to 30 cm (12 in.) long. Flowers lavender-blue with a yellow blotch, to 5 cm (2 in.) wide, somewhat 2-lipped; 6 petals, 6 stamens.

Fruit: 3-celled capsule with many minute, ribbed seeds; seeds form in submerged, withered flowers.



Photos and illustration courtesy of: Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida

Look for first:

- Large spike of lavender-blue flowers
- Spongy, bulbous leaf stalks
- Large rounded glossy leaves

Distribution

Origin in tropical Brazil, but has become naturalized in many warm parts of the world: Central America, North America, Africa, India, Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

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