

Problematic Invasive Plants

Water Hyacinth



This exotic plant varies in size from a few inches to over three feet tall, with eye-catching lavender flowers and rounded leathery leaves, attached to spongy stalks. Found in isolated areas, it can be difficult to eradicate because of overgrowth of Brazilian Pepper on canal banks. It grows quickly and can cover a canal 100% which causes navigation and dissolved oxygen issues.

Water Lettuce



This is an exotic floating plant with soft light green leaves that are formed in rosettes. The flowers are inconspicuous. It can be found in isolated areas of the City. Due to its rapid growth, it can cause the same issues in the canals as Water Hyacinth.

The canals in the City are constantly changing due to stormwater input. These are unique systems that plants and wildlife utilize. The City of Cape Coral's Environmental Resource Division (ERD) and Lee County Hyacinth Control District (LCHCD) consider that aquatic vegetation is an essential component of the canal systems within the city because they help in the filtration of nutrients and provide fish habitat. Problematic invasive plants are treated by LCHCD to keep them from taking over the canal systems, decreasing flow, and interfering with wildlife habitat. Native vegetation will not be treated unless it reaches levels that interfere with navigation or flood control. Native vegetation will not be treated for aesthetic purposes only.

For more information about aquatic plants or environmental issues please contact

ERD at: 239-574-0785
LCHCD at 239-694-2174

Additional resources are available at:
plants.ifas.ufl.edu/
www.floridainvasives.org/cismas.cfm
myfwc.com/media/617887/AquaticPlantIdentifier.pdf

Native macro-algae, Muskgrass is found throughout the canals

Freshwater Plants of Cape Coral



Native submerged aquatic plant Tapogass or *Vallisneria americana* provides food and habitat for wildlife

Cape Coral has Both Native and Non-native Aquatic Plants

- Some are rooted in the sediments, while others float on the surface and are not rooted to any substrate
- These act as natural filters for our stormwater and are an important indicator of water quality
- Vegetation in shallow waters supports a diversity of creatures by providing spawning, nursery, refuge, and foraging grounds for many species
- These plants also cycle and absorb nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen, increase water clarity, stabilize sediments and reduce shoreline erosion

Why are Aquatic Plants Perceived as a Problem?

- Occasionally problems arise when dense plant growth impedes recreational activities
- Very dense native plant growth is caused by an overabundance of nutrients; sources include septic systems and fertilizer run-off
- These increased nutrients accelerate the natural process of eutrophication, increasing plant and algal growth. Once nutrients are in a waterbody, they can persist for decades before being flushed out, fueling plant and algae growth even after nutrient sources have ceased

Duckweed



When there is plenty of freshwater inputs (such as lake releases or rain) and high nutrient levels in the canals, very small light green free-floating plants can grow quickly and form a dense-looking mat. Found in still or sluggish waters, it can be seen all over Cape Coral in the warm rainy season. Although unsightly, it is not dangerous to wildlife or people. Duckweed colonies provide habitat for aquatic invertebrates but may reduce dissolved oxygen if coverage is high.

Cattails



This tall native plant can be found in all freshwater and salt water canals. They are among the most common of all aquatic and wetland plants anywhere. It provides cover and nesting areas for animals and birds and is a good plant for water quality. Managers rarely control native plants. However, due to its aggressive growth, it may build up at weir/barrier structures which can cause flood control issues. In undisturbed systems, native plants are usually in balance with their environment.

Bryozoans



Not a plant, but (plant-like) tiny colonial animals that can form jelly-like masses which are often found attached to sticks, aquatic plants, or docks. These native organisms are common and abundant in Cape Coral, sometimes covering canals. The colors can range from red to brown to green. All freshwater species are self-propagating and can multiply quickly in late summer and fall. They are not toxic or harmful and do not pose a navigation hazard. They remove particles from the water improving water quality. Removal will not eradicate them, as there will be new colonies next year.

Spatterdock



This is a large native plant with floating heart-shaped leaves, however submersed and immersed leaves are common as well. It blooms with bright yellow flowers from spring to early fall. A great plant for water quality and fish habitat as it absorbs nutrients from the water that could potentially lead to algae growth. However, its aggressive growth can lead to navigation issues. Roots can provide spawning substrate for fishes such as crappie and bream. Spatterdock may be confused with water lily which has a larger flower and showier white petals.