

NOT WANTED



WATER LETTUCE

ALIAS: PISTIA STRATIOTES

Distribution: Water lettuce is an aquatic weed found worldwide that thrives in tropical and subtropical regions. Water lettuce is thought to originate in South America because the widest suite of native aquatic insects associated with it occurs there.

Size: The leaves are 1-6 inches wide and have veins running their length.

Description: Water lettuce is distinctive and almost impossible to mistake, as it looks like an open head of lettuce. It has a cluster of soft, light green hairy leaves with parallel ridges (leaf veins), grouped in a rosette. It draws nourishment from the water column, with a short bunch of feathery roots hanging below it. It reproduces both by seed, and vegetatively, with daughter plants connected to mother plants by short stolons.

Impacts to Aquatic Ecosystem:

Water lettuce can form dense carpets of vegetation on the water surface, blocking sunlight from reaching submerged plants and reducing the oxygen exchange at the water's surface. It can also grow to form surface mats impenetrable to boats, swimmers and waterfowl.

Means of Introduction: *Pistia stratiotes* continues to be sold through aquarium and pond supply dealers, both online and in retail garden centers. New introductions are probably the result of improper disposal of ornamental pond plants or waters, or when ponds adjacent to local water bodies overflow with winter rains. Because the stolons are long and produce viable vegetative daughter plants, this plant may also arrive in new locations by hitchhiking on boat trailers or other gear.

Status in Maryland: Currently found in Mattawoman Creek, a large Potomac River tributary in Charles County.

Legal Standing: There are currently no laws prohibiting the sale or distribution of water lettuce in MD.



For a one page informational brochure available for distribution, visit

http://www.dnr.state.md.us/invasives/WaterLettuce_Poster.pdf

