

## The Happy Intruder - Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)

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It's hard to imagine that such a pretty and happy yellow flower, which grows in dense mats along shorelines, streams, ponds, wetlands, bogs, swamps, marshes, forest, dry uplands, water gardens, and ornamental gardens, is actually an incredibly aggressive invasive species!

On Thursday June 19th, Alyssa and I got to see firsthand how this beauty has become an intruder. We put the canoe in at Stacks Bay on Lake Minocqua and paddled east to where the Highway 47 Bridge crosses the lake's thoroughfare. As we rounded the last corner, I gasped as we got our first glimpse of the invasion. The Yellow Iris was so dense on the south side, that all the native aquatic vegetation was gone. Yes, you read correctly, gone - completely displaced!



We paddled up next to the stand and were amazed by the fact that they almost towered over us and were growing in water depth of at least 4 feet. Obtaining a plant sample by its roots/tubers improved my learning curve. First off, it was growing in such deep water that I could not reach far enough to touch its base. I grabbed the stalk as far down as I could and gave it several tugs, but it felt like it was rooted in concrete. Finally, after several tries, I was able to obtain the entire plant including its tuber. The difficulty I had obtaining a sample affirmed that the Yellow Flag Iris means business when it plants its roots in the aquatic substrate.



If you have this plant growing on your property, please dig it out, including the tubers, dispose of it in a garbage bag and plant a native iris or other native plant in its place.

### Facts about Yellow flag Iris.

- Other names for this plant include: Yellow iris, Water flag, European yellow iris, Pale-yellow iris.
- It is a showy perennial plant that is a native to Eurasia.
- Ecological threat: Yellow flag iris can produce many seeds that can float from the parent plant or, plants can spread vegetatively via rhizome fragments.
- Once established it forms dense clumps or floating mats that can alter wildlife habitat and species diversity.
- All parts of this plant are poisonous, which results in lowered wildlife food sources in areas where it dominates.
- This species has the ability to escape water gardens and ponds and grow in undisturbed and natural environments. It can grow in wetlands, forests, bogs, swamps, marshes, lakes, streams and ponds.
- Dense areas of this plant may alter hydrology by trapping sediment.

## Identification:

- Leaves & stems: Broad, sword-shaped leaves grow upright, tall and stiff. They are green with a slight blue-grey tint and are very difficult to distinguish from other ornamental or native iris species. Flowers are produced on a stem that can grow 3-4 feet tall amongst leaves that are usually as tall or taller.
- Flowers: Showy and variable in color from almost white to a vibrant dark yellow. Flowers are between 3-4 inches wide and bloom from April to June. Three upright petals are less showy than the larger three downward pointing sepals, which may have brown to purple colored streaks.
- Fruits & seeds: Seeds are produced in fruits that are 6-angled capsules, 2-4 inches long. Each fruit may have over 100 seeds that start pale before turning dark brown. Each seed has a hard outer casing with a small air space underneath, which allows the seeds to float.
- Roots: Thick, fleshy pink-colored rhizomes spread extensively in good conditions, forming thick mats that can float on the surface of water.
- Similar species: When not flowering, yellow flag iris could be easily confused with the native blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*) as well as other ornamental iris that is not invasive. Blue flag iris is usually smaller and does not tend to form as dense clumps or floating mats. When not flowering or showing fruiting bodies, yellow flag iris may be confused with other wetland plants such as cattails (*Typha* spp.) or sweet flag (*Acorus* spp.) species.



## Control:

- Mechanical: Small populations may be successfully removed using physical methods. Care should be taken if hand-pulling plants as some people show skin sensitivity to plant sap and tissues. All parts of the plant should be dug out – particularly rhizomes and disposed of in landfill or by burning. Cutting the seed heads may help decrease the plant spreading.
- Chemical: Aquatic formulas of herbicides may be used to control yellow flag iris, however, permits may be needed. Foliar spray, cut stem/leaf and application and hand swiping of herbicide have all shown effectiveness.



**Photo Credit:** Stephanie Boismenu, OCLWCD

**Resources:** <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/fact/YellowFlagIris.html>