



THE HAPPY INTRUDER



Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)

Do you have this plant growing on you property? If so, please dig it out and plant a native iris or other native plants in its place.

It is 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! I have seen Yellow Iris stands that were so dense and massive in size, that I could not identify a single native plant within the Yellow Iris stand. Yes, you read correctly, the native plants were gone - completely displaced!



Facts about Yellow flag Iris:

- Other names for this plant include yellow iris, Water flag, European yellow iris, Pale-yellow iris.
- *Iris pseudacorus* is native to Europe, British Isles, North Africa and the Mediterranean region and introduced to the North America as an ornamental plant for water gardens and ponds.
- Some people show skin sensitivity to plant sap and tissues. To avoid exposure, wear gloves when working with this plant. This plant is poisonous to animals.

Ecological threat:

This species has the ability to escape water gardens and ponds and grow in undisturbed and natural environments. The plant spreads by water-dispersed seeds and by massive underground stems known as rhizomes that send out new shoots, connecting several hundred plants together. Fragments of rhizomes that break off can also form new plants. Yellow iris forms extremely large, dense stands that displace native species, changes wetlands from a wet to a drier environment, reduces habitat available for wildlife, including native fish habitat and bird nesting and rearing sites. The dense root mats can block water flow in irrigation and flood control ditches.

Identification:

- **Location:** Plants grow along shorelines, wet soil, or emerge from shallow water. I have seen it growing in water depths of at least 4 feet.
- **Leaves:** Broad, sword-shaped leaves grow upright, tall and stiff. They are light to dark green and are difficult to distinguish from other ornamental or native iris species. Leaves can reach 6 feet tall.
- **Flowers:** Large (4 inches), showy and variable in color from pale to deep yellow. Flowers are six-lobed including 3 upright petals, which are less showy than the larger 3 downward-spreading sepals; On each flower sepal are patterns of delicate light-brown to purple veins or flecks. Bisexual. In Northern Wisconsin, it blooms from April –July.
- **Flower stem:** Erect stalks 3-4 feet in height amongst leaves that are usually as tall or taller.
- **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, 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 are 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. All parts of the plant should be dug out, including rhizomes, and disposed of in the landfill or by burning.
- Cutting the seed heads may help decrease the plant spreading.
- **Chemical:** Aquatic formulas of herbicides may be used. However, permits may be needed. Plants growing near standing water should be treated with an herbicide approved for aquatic use to minimize harm to amphibians

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