
Hydrilla: The perfect aquatic weed

Warm weather is upon us which means that conditions are again favorable for one of Osceola County's worst invasive weeds: hydrilla.

This aquatic plant infests many of our local lakes and ponds and can become a nuisance if it's not actively managed. Why then are some scientists calling this weed "perfect"? Hydrilla has been called "the perfect aquatic weed" by University of Florida Professor Dr. Kenneth A. Langeland, but not because it is beneficial by any means! No, hydrilla is a "perfect" weed because it is so good at surviving and thriving in the aquatic environment. It is one of the most invasive aquatic weeds in Florida and it causes serious environmental and economic problems, especially here in Osceola County.

It is considered a "weed" because it grows where it is not wanted and chokes out native plants. This invasive weed forms dense mats that can create severe infestations.

One of the main reasons it is important to control hydrilla is to prevent flooding of residences. Infestations of hydrilla can greatly slow water flow and clog flood control structures, which leads to flooding and damage to property. After the 2004 hurricanes, flooding could have been much worse if the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Invasive Plant Management Section hadn't been actively controlling hydrilla in our lakes. Hydrilla can also negatively impact water quality, access for navigation and sportfish populations.

Even though hydrilla may be "perfect" at being an invasive weed, it is not perfect for the environment or economy in Florida.

It is very difficult and expensive to manage hydrilla but the benefits far outweigh the costs. The high costs and impacts to the environment, drainage, and irrigation are reasons why the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded Osceola County a \$2.88 million grant. The grant seeks to find new and alternative cost-effective control methods for hydrilla and other invasive aquatic weeds.

For more information on invasive weeds and what you can do to help stop their spread, visit <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/osceola>.

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