

Weed alert

Red Root floater

(*Phyllanthus fluitans*)

Phyllanthus fluitans is a freshwater species native to South America and is the sole free-floating aquatic species of the large genus *Phyllanthus*. Common names of *P. fluitans* include red root floater and floating spurge. In 2010, red root floater was found growing in a canal and tributaries in, and near, the Peace River, Desoto County, Florida.

Because red root floater is a popular aquarium plant, it may have been introduced via the aquarium-plant trade. Red root floater can produce a closed canopy over water; and in backwater areas, small isolated populations can be difficult to find. Scientists fear if this species expands its range, it may become as problematical in Florida as have the South American water lettuce and water hyacinth, also canopy-producers.



Red root floater mat



Close up of red root floater



Red root floater growth form – shoots and flowers

Guide to identification:

Foliage leaves – These are distichously arranged, range from 9 to 17 mm long and are separated by internodes 5 to 20 mm long. Each leaf exhibits a lamina, a petiole less than 1 mm long, and two brown-transparent stipules. The lamina (the distal expanded portion of the leaf) is more or less orbicular (circular), entire and unlobed marginally, cordate basally, and with a shallow notch distally. It exhibits two deep pockets – one on each side of the midrib. The leaves exhibit a light blue-green color.

Shoots and stems – Shoots of *P. fluitans* either float on the water surface or, where plants bunch together, they may also extend a short distance into the air. The stems are brittle, are approximately 1 to 1.5 mm in diameter, and range up to 130 mm long.

Cymules and flowers – Most cymules are three-flowered, but two or four flowers may occur. Each cymule exhibits at least one staminate flower and one pistillate flower. Flowers are short-pedicellate, radially symmetrical, and normally exhibit three sepals and three petals. Because sepals and petals are comparable in color, size and shape, they are called tepals. The tepals are white or greenish-white and are not fused together. The flowers vary from 2 to 3.5 mm in diameter.

Fruits – The fruit, a capsule, is subtended by persistent tepals. It is depressed-globose and 3 mm wide. The capsule is trilocular and six-seeded, with two seeds filling each locule. The seeds, which outwardly resemble orange segments, exhibit numerous minute, dark-brown, superficial processes over a light brown background.



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