

Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) A Major Aquatic Invasive Plant

Hydrilla verticillata is an aquatic plant. It was introduced to Florida in the 1950s. Hydrilla was used in aquariums as an ornamental, or decorative, plant. Hydrilla also produces oxygen in the water which is good for the aquarium. Scientists think hydrilla comes from, or is native to, Southeast Asia. It is non-native to Florida. Invasive plants are non-native plants that cause harm to the environment and/or the economy. Hydrilla is an invasive plant in Florida.

Hydrilla is an herbaceous species. It has long narrow stems with short and narrow leaves. The leaves grow in a circle around the stem (called a whorl). Each whorl has four to eight leaves. Hydrilla is one of the most common submersed, or underwater, aquatic weeds in the world. Hydrilla can grow in fresh water only a few inches deep. It can also grow in fresh water as deep as 20 feet. It is most commonly found in lakes, streams, ditches, canals, springs and stormwater retention ponds. Hydrilla easily reproduces from pieces that break off the plant. Each piece can grow into a new plant. Bud-like turions can also break off the plant and grow into new plants. Bulb-like growths called tubers are produced on hydrilla's lower stems. Tubers can survive for years in wet soils before sprouting.

Hydrilla can grow more than one inch per day! When hydrilla takes over, fewer plant and animal species are able to survive. Hydrilla can reduce the number of fish and zooplankton if it grows too densely. It is found throughout Florida. Some people throw hydrilla in the water when they no longer want it in their aquariums. They also accidentally transport it from one place to another on their boats. A lot of money is spent each year trying to control hydrilla. Make sure to do your part! Don't empty aquariums into local waterbodies such as lakes, springs, streams, ponds or rivers. Make sure to check your boat and trailer for plant pieces when you leave the boat ramp. Remove any plant pieces and throw them in the trash (not the water!). Tell others what you know about invasive plants. Even a little hydrilla can fill up a waterbody and make it unusable for fun, recreational activities such as boating, fishing and swimming.

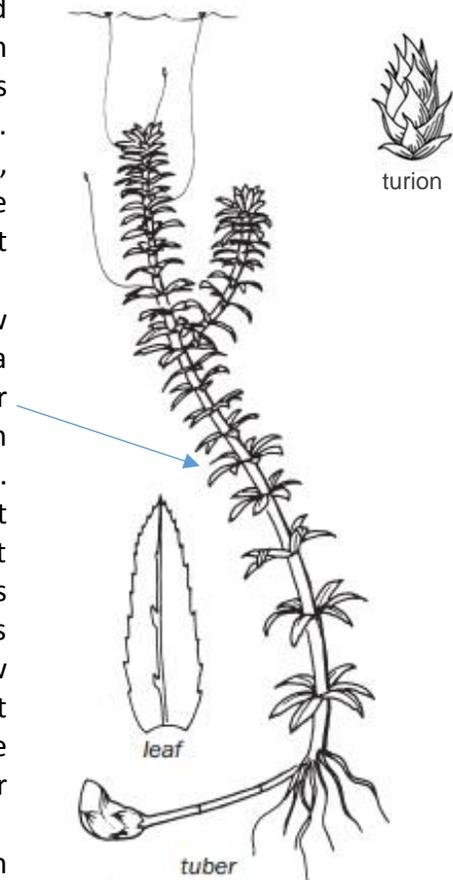


Photo and illustration courtesy of Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida

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Sources:

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/183>

<http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/invasive-plants/weed-alerts/hydrilla/>

http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/education/module2/web/fish_tale.html

