



Florida Department of Environmental Protection

WEED ALERT

Water-spinach

(*Ipomoea aquatica*)



Water-spinach flower



Water-spinach - This introduction from Southeast Asia is a popular cultivated green vegetable in China, India, Malaysia, Africa, Brazil, the West Indies, and Central America. Due to its aggressive growth rate, water-spinach has great potential to invade moist cultivated areas, such as rice and sugar cane fields, and wet areas such as the Everglades, natural lakes and rivers, drainage canals, and ditches. In Florida, isolated populations have been found floating and creeping horizontally along shorelines and over water for long distances, especially in canals and lakes.

Why water-spinach must be managed:

A single water-spinach plant can branch profusely with stems growing to over 70 feet long. This fast growth rate, approximately 4 inches per day, represents a significant threat to flood control and native plant habitats, especially in central and south Florida.

Environmental damage caused by water-spinach populations:

- ▶ Water-spinach creates impenetrable masses of tangled vegetation obstructing water flow in drainage and flood control canals.
- ▶ Water-spinach infests lake, pond, and river shorelines, displacing native plants that are important for fish and wildlife.
- ▶ Water-spinach forms dense impenetrable canopies over small ponds and retention basins creating stagnant water conditions that are ideal breeding environments for mosquitoes.



Dense water-spinach mat in a Florida pond.

Because of its aggressive growth rate, never plant water-spinach in Florida's ponds, lakes, rivers and canals. The possession of water-spinach is prohibited without a special permit.

Water-spinach *Ipomoea aquatica*

Synonymy: Ipomoea reptans, Ipomoea repens, Convolvulus reptans.

Water-spinach is a creeping, herbaceous vine that is cultivated in some cultures as a vegetable. It is recognizable as a member of the “morning-glory” family.

 **Leaves:** alternate, simple, with smooth petioles 3-14 cm (1-6 in) long; leaf blades generally arrowhead shaped but variable, smooth (rarely hairy), to 17 cm (7 in) long, with tips pointed; blades held above water when stems floating.

 **Stems:** herbaceous, trailing, with milky sap and roots at the nodes; usually to 3 m (9 ft) long but can be much longer.

 **Flowers:** showy, white, or pale pink to lilac; broadly funnel shaped, “morning-glory” like; solitary or in few-flowered clusters at leaf axils.

 **Fruit:** an oval or spherical capsule, woody at maturity, about 1 cm (1/2 in) wide, holding 1-4 grayish seeds, these often short-hairy.



Illustration courtesy of Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida

LOOK FOR FIRST:

Vine growing on or near the water's edge

Arrowhead-shaped leaves

“Morning-glory” funneled flower

Distribution: Native to China, but widely cultivated and naturalized in Africa, Asia, Australia, Pacific Islands, and South America.

