



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226  
(360) 354-3990 [www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds)

## FRAGRANT WATER LILY

*Nymphaea odorata*

**THREAT:** Fragrant water lily is an aquatic plant, native to the eastern United States, which has been introduced to Washington as an ornamental plant. This floating-leafed plant can form dense mats, which interfere with recreation, water movement, and native plants and animals. Mats of fragrant water lily can completely cover the surface of shallow lakes. The mats of plants can cause a reduction in the oxygen content in the water, affecting fish. Fragrant water lily reproduces by seed and by rhizomes, which can produce new plants if broken off from the parent plant. The seed is spread by water currents and by waterfowl. Although wildlife will eat fragrant water lily, this benefit is far outweighed by the damage it does to the native lake species.

**DESCRIPTION:** Fragrant water lily is an aquatic perennial with floating leaves. It will root in water up to 6 feet deep and has a large, spreading root system. The leaves, which can grow up to 11 inches in diameter, are green on top; the undersides are purple to red, with numerous veins. The stem is attached to the center of the circular leaves, with a deep cleft to the stem in the leaf. The leaves and stems die back in the winter and new growth is produced by the root system each spring. The nursery industry has developed many flower color variations for this plant, however the strain which has naturalized in Washington has white (sometimes pink) flowers. The many-petaled flowers are large and showy, blooming from June to September. As the name implies, the flowers are very fragrant. Native Americans in the eastern U.S. used fragrant water lily for both food and medical purposes. The similar aquatic plant called spatterdock (also called yellow pond or cow lily) has yellow, ball-shaped flowers and leaves in the shape of elephant ears.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Like all aquatic weeds, control is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. The best control is to prevent the introduction of any non-native aquatic plants to water bodies. Fragrant water lily can be controlled through mechanical (cutting, harvesting or rotovating) and chemical means. If plants are cut or rotovated, the plants and rhizomes should be removed from the water. Bottom barriers can also be used in small areas, to prevent rooted aquatic plant growth. Grass carp will not eat fragrant water lily. For site-specific chemical recommendations, contact the weed control board.

