



# 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)

## PARROTFEATHER

### *Myriophyllum aquaticum*

**THREAT:** Parrotfeather is an aquatic plant, native to south America, which was introduced as an ornamental plant for water gardens and aquariums. This plant spreads through plant fragments and rhizomes and forms dense mats of vegetation. In shallow water bodies, it can completely cover the surface of the water. Parrotfeather infestation can completely change both the physical and chemical characteristics of the water body. This plant can impact all uses of the aquatic system, including recreational uses, water movement and wildlife habitat. It also creates excellent habitat for mosquito larvae. In Washington State, it is no longer legal to purchase this plant. The first record of an escaped population of parrotfeather in Whatcom County was in 2004.



**DESCRIPTION:** Parrotfeather is an aquatic perennial. It grows best when rooted in shallow water, but can also grow as a floating plant in deeper water, under appropriate conditions. The feather-like leaves are arranged in whorls of four to six around the stem. Submerged leaves are more feathery and often reddish, while the emergent leaves are bright green. The stems can grow up to five feet long and can extend up to a foot above water. This erect, emergent, bright green stem has been likened to a small fir tree growing on top of the water and is the most obvious identifying characteristic of parrotfeather (the submersed growth form alone is often confused with Eurasian watermilfoil, another aquatic weed). The plant forms a dense mat of intertwined brownish rhizomes in the water, with many long roots that form at the nodes. Parrotfeather flowers in the spring, with small white flowers forming where the emergent leaves attach to the stem. However, since there are only female plants in the United States, reproduction occurs only through plant fragmentation and rhizomes.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Like all aquatic weeds, control is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. To prevent the spread of any of these plants, trailers, boats and fishing gear should be carefully inspected to avoid transporting plant materials between water bodies. Aquarium plants should never be discarded in sewer systems or water bodies. Accurate identification of parrotfeather is essential before control work can begin, as it resembles other aquatic plants. Control efforts can include chemical and mechanical measures, although success is usually limited. Due to the thick, waxy covering on the emergent plant parts, this plant does not easily absorb herbicides and a wetting agent is required. Mechanical control will open up the water body, but does not kill the plant. Extreme care must be used, as escaped plant fragments will spread the infestation. Mechanical control can last up to a year. Grass carp find parrotfeather unpalatable, due to its woody stems and high tannin content. Water drawdowns are also limited in success, as the plant rhizomes can often survive in the soil. For site-specific recommendations, contact the weed control board.

