

Hydrilla

Hot Topic

On the surface, Hobomoc Pond looks like any other lake in Pembroke, tranquil and picturesque, it's waters sparkling in the sunlight. However, Hobomoc Pond has a secret. Lurking just beneath the surface, quietly overtaking the pond, is the aggressive non-native aquatic plant, Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*).

Hydrilla is native to Africa, Australia, and parts of Asia and was introduced to the United State via the aquarium trade in the 1960s. Today, Hydrilla is considered one of the most problematic aquatic plants in the United States, and the sale, trade and distribution of this species is prohibited at both the state and federal level. Once Hydrilla becomes established in a water body, management is expensive and complete eradication is unlikely. The southern states spend millions of dollars annually trying to control Hydrilla.



Since Hydrilla is not native to our region, it lacks biological controls to keep its population in check. Hydrilla can form dense mats that render boating, swimming and fishing difficult or impossible, and this loss of recreational use can diminish surrounding property values. When Hydrilla invades a water body it upsets the delicate balance of the lake ecosystem by out-competing native species for nutrients, space, light and other resources, ultimately lowering the biodiversity of the area.

Like many other non-native aquatic plants, Hydrilla spreads primarily by fragmentation. Viable plant fragments are transported between water bodies on fishing gear, trailers, boat motors, anchors and occasionally in live-well or bait bucket water. Fragments can also be carried to new locations in connecting river or streams. Since there no nearby infestations of Hydrilla in the Commonwealth, it is likely that the Pembroke population of Hydrilla is the result of someone emptying their aquarium into the pond.

The presence of Hydrilla was discovered by Bill Glover, a local Pembroke resident who had received training in aquatic plant identification through the DCR Lakes and Ponds Weed Watcher Program. Distinguishing Hydrilla from native Common Waterweed (*Elodea sp*) is challenging. Common Waterweed has whorls of comprised of three leaves, whereas, Hydrilla has whorls of four to eight leaves. Another key feature is the deeply serrated leaf margins on Hydrilla, compared to Elodea's smooth leaf margins. (see drawing).

This year DCR Lakes and Ponds staff will work with the Town of Pembroke, the Pembroke Watershed Association and a hired consultant to develop a plan to control the Hydrilla in Hobomoc Pond and to prevent its spread to other ponds. The first year of control will be funded by the Lakes and Ponds Program as part of the programs rapid response initiative.

If you think you have seen Hydrilla, please email Michelle Robinson at michelle.robinson@state.ma.us. For more information in general on Hydrilla, view the [Hydrilla Fact Sheet](#).

