

Yellow Flag Iris

Invasive Species Alert Sheet

Regional Invasive Species Program

The spread of non-native invasive plants has serious ecological, economic and health impacts.

Local governments and partners are asking for help from all residents to address **yellow flag iris** (*Iris pseudacorus*) outbreaks on private property and public lands. Homeowners can manage this plant themselves, or reach out to local professionals for assistance. Native to Africa, Asia and Europe, this plant was introduced to North America as a pond ornamental and has quickly spread. There are populations across the capital region.

Look for: This is the only yellow iris that occurs in wetland environments, leaf has distinguishing ridge in centre, fan-shaped plant base.

Why is yellow flag iris a problem?

- Highly invasive, forms dense mats in wetlands preventing water flow and growth of native species, clogs streams and irrigation systems
- Alters habitat including width of water courses by compacting soil, trapping sediments and increasing elevation
- Difficult to remove once established as rhizomes form thick, interwoven mats
- Seed pods are buoyant and can remain afloat for up to a year, may spread very long distances down watercourses
- **Causes skin irritation in humans and poisoning in livestock if ingested**



Yellow Flag Iris

What does it look like?

- **Flowers:** Yellow with 3 small slender petals facing up and 3 larger ones drooping down, may be streaked with brown or purple veins, may have several flowers on each stem
- **Leaves:** Flattened and sword-like, 2-3 cm wide, up to 1 m tall, with ridge in the centre, fanning out from the base like a "hand of cards", may remain green during mild winters
- **Seeds:** Reddish-brown flattened, like round corn kernels, to 8 mm, in rows within large glossy green, banana shaped, 3-angled pods (4-8 cm long)
- **Rhizomes:** Stout and tuberous, pinkish, 1-4 cm thick, form dense mats up to 30 cm deep
- **Could be confused with:**
 - Yellow bearded iris (*Iris germanica*)
 - Cattail (*Typha latifolia*): round at the base and taller than yellow flag iris
 - Bur-reed (*Sparganium spp*): leaves are thick, spongy and narrower than iris leaves



Yellow Flag Iris Grouping

Habitat and biology

- Perennial in the Iridaceae (iris) family, re-grows each spring from rhizomes or seeds
- Flowers appear April – July
- Grows in water to 50 cm deep, most common along the edges of slow-moving water
- Tolerates a range of growing conditions including drying, low oxygen, high acidity and brackish water

Prevention

- Yellow flag iris is sold through garden centres and online. **Do not purchase, trade, grow or share this plant.**

What to do if you spot a yellow flag iris plant:

Efforts are most likely to succeed when patches are small and manageable. The goal is to deplete future seed sources by removing all flowers and seed heads and monitoring regrowth after removal.

Caution: all plant parts can cause skin irritation. Ensure gloves, safety glasses and long sleeved clothing is worn during any work with this plant.

For small populations, less than 1m², dig up and remove manually. For larger populations:

- The most effective treatment is a combination of aggressive cutting and use of PVC pond liner to smother
- In early spring, cut plant materials close to the ground (within 2-5 cm of base)
- Cover the plants with PVC pond liner. Tarps or plastic sheets will not work. Extend the pond liner 20 cm past the edge of the infested areas to ensure all rhizomes are covered.
- Dig a trench and push the pond liner into the ground
- Use 10 inch spikes with washers to “sew” multiple sheets of pond liner under one another to ensure there are no open seams.
- Use rocks to secure the pond liner to the soil surface to prevent shifting. Ensure the pond liner does not have any air bubbles underneath.



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Yellow Flag Iris Seeds

- Regularly check the pond liner and remove only when rhizomes have turned dark brown and mushy
- Remove any sprouted seedlings in the summer (July)
- Monitor regularly for re-growth, remove any new plants that appear
- Pond liner will likely need to be in place 4-6 months for success

Proper disposal:

- Place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled “Invasive Species” and take to Hartland Landfill
- Do not leave rhizomes on site to decompose.
- **Do not compost!** Flowers can still form viable seeds and rhizomes can continue to grow after removal.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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