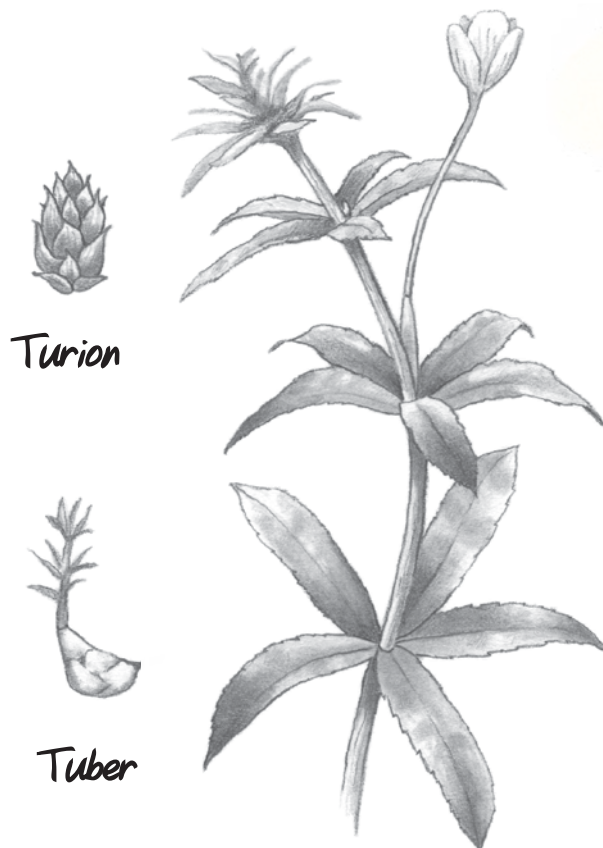


Hydrilla

Scourge of waterways now in six Kentucky lakes

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Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) is an underwater aquatic plant that originated in Asia. Its first known introduction in the United States occurred in Florida during the 1950s. Since then, it has spread to 33 states, including Kentucky. This invasive plant now grows in Kentucky, Dewey, Carr Creek, Paintsville, Greenbo and Cave Run lakes.



Hydrilla is a thin-stalked plant. Its pointed leaves grow in whorls of four to eight around the stem. Hydrilla rarely reproduces through seeds. Instead, it usually spreads by tubers, turions - the buds found against the leaf - and fragmentation. The process of fragmentation, the most common way hydrilla spreads, occurs when part of the plant breaks off and sprouts in a new area.

Hydrilla grows quickly - up to an inch per day. It can double its biomass in two weeks. Hydrilla also has special characteristics that help it outcompete other aquatic plants. It also can grow in light as dim as 1 percent. It grows deeper than most other aquatic plants - as much as 30 feet deep - and starts photosynthesizing much earlier in the morning. Hydrilla branches heavily as it grows closer to the surface, forming large mats that block sunlight to other vegetation below. Hydrilla stores enough nutrients in its tubers to allow it to live for up to seven years in the soil without sprouting.

Combatting hydrilla is no simple task; prevention is the best means of control. Boaters and anglers should avoid boating through the mats of hydrilla. They must clean all vegetation off the boat. Anglers who fish an infested lake then plan to launch at an unaffected lake should keep their boats out of the water for at least five days to allow any hidden plant material to dry out.



Hydrilla is an example of why people should never introduce foreign plants to Kentucky's waterways. Ecosystems are delicate. The introduction of new plants or animals can cause major harm to native species.

The dense mats of hydrilla impact all forms of water recreation. Fish in infested lakes don't grow as long or weigh as much because they have a harder time finding prey. Hydrilla can affect fish reproduction by growing over spawning sites. This invasive plant is tough to control because it has no natural predators or diseases.