

Curly Waterweed

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Lagarosiphon major*

AKA: Curly Water-thyme, Elodea crispata

Native to: Southern Africa

Habitat: Standing waters such as lakes and canals

A perennial, aquatic plant which can grow up to 3 m completely submerged under the water in chalk, gravel and clay pits, lakes, reservoirs and canals. Leaves are strongly curved and whorled around the stem though are spirally arranged on the lower part of stem. Flowers are inconspicuous and borne separately as male and female flowers. Plants spread mainly by vegetative propagation through detached stem fragments and can become easily established.

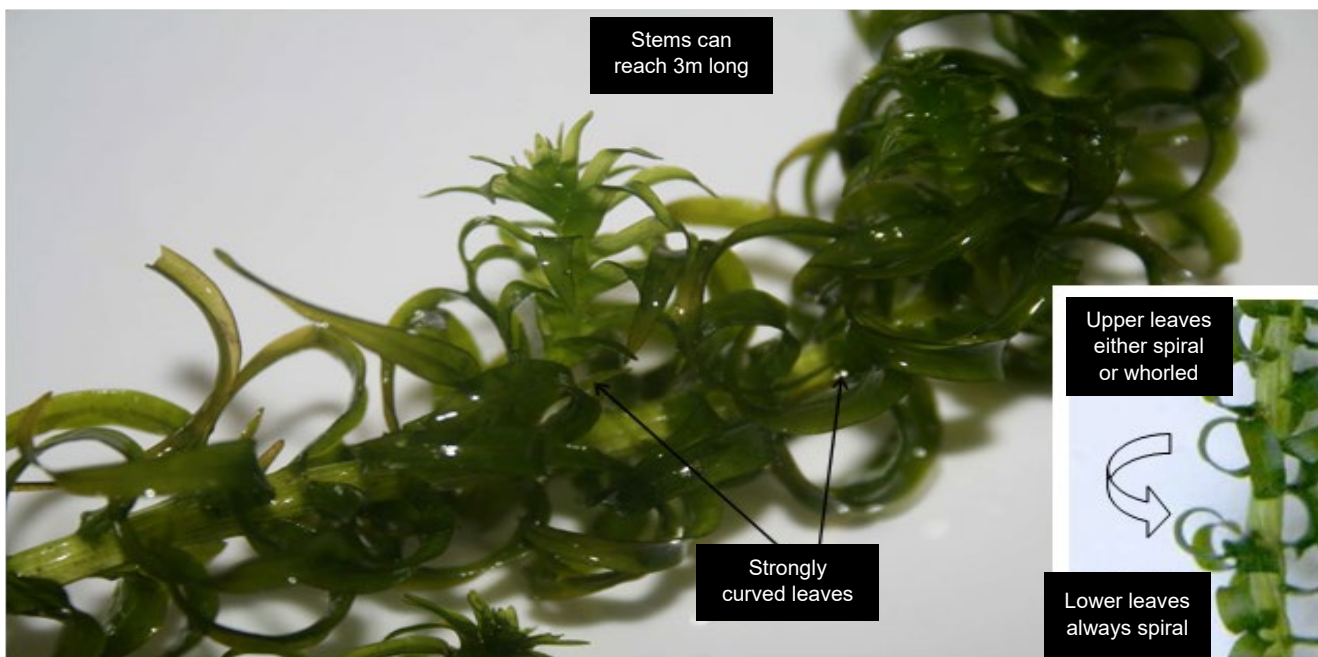
First recorded in Northern Ireland in 2002 in a clay pit on the Ards Peninsula in Co. Down, and it is now known from a mill weir on the Six Mile Water, at Dunadry, in Co. Antrim.

It is widely sold as an aquarium and garden pond plant and the Northern Ireland population is most likely due to deliberate or accidental release. Like many nuisance aquatic plants, curly waterweed can overwhelm ponds and out-compete native vegetation as well as choke up waterways, exacerbating flood risk.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; grow or cultivate; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Curly waterweed, or to release it into the environment.



Key ID Features



Stems can
reach 3m long

Strongly
curved
leaves

Upper leaves
either spiral
or whorled

Lower leaves
always spiral

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

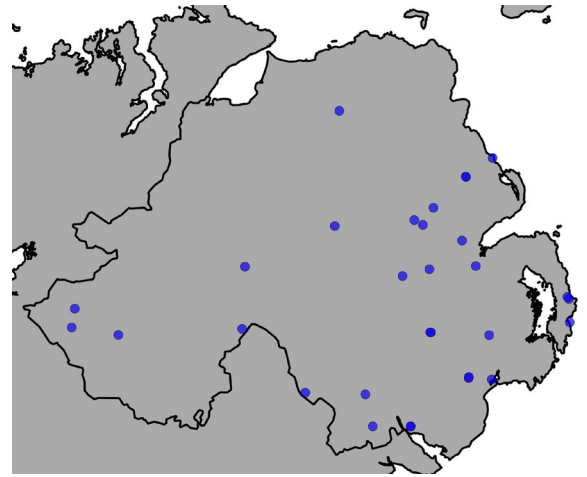
Impacts

The plant forms very dense infestations in suitable habitats and is capable of occupying the full water column (in waters up to 6m deep). Due to its rampant growth, it develops rapidly into a tangled mass that blocks out the light which results in significant changes to the ecology for native plants, insects and fish.

Lagarosiphon major is a serious threat for tourism, angling, boating and other recreational pursuits as well as conservation goals. The plant also causes significant economic damage by choking up water channels and hydroelectric plants.

Distribution

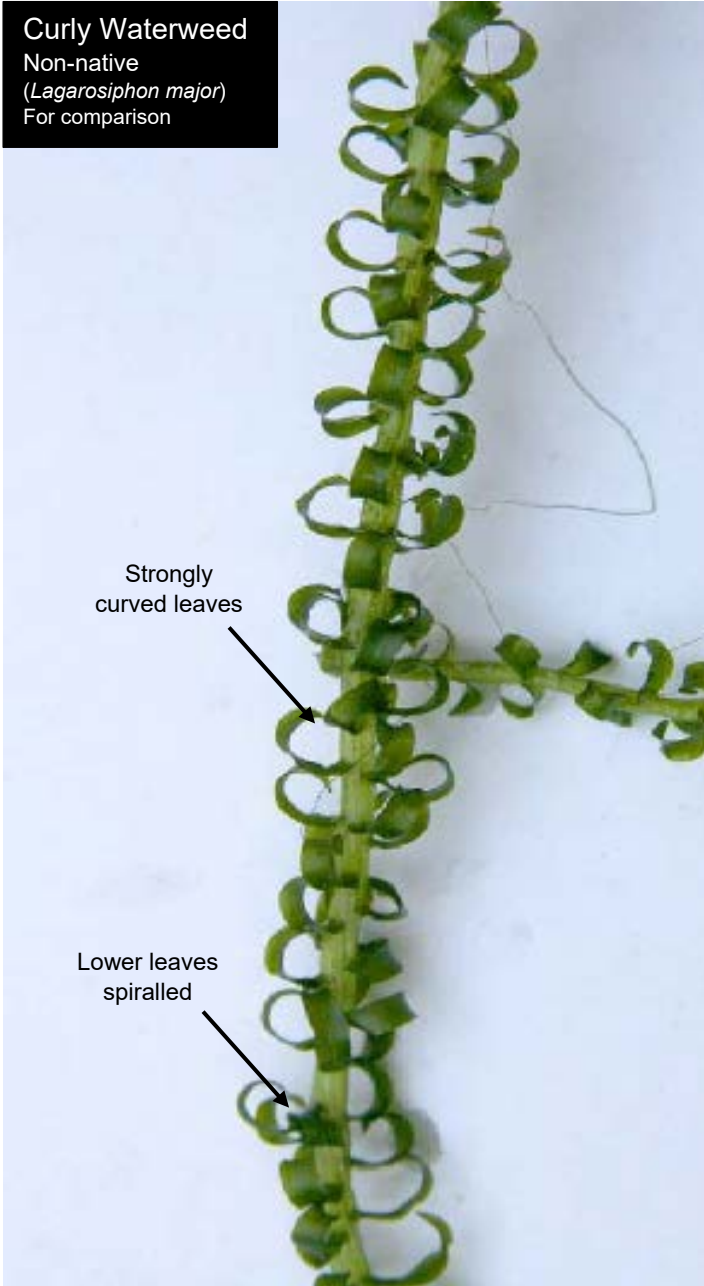
Curly Waterweed is found at a number of sites across Northern Ireland



Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland – <https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000460065>
Check website for current distribution

Similar species

Curly Waterweed
Non-native
(*Lagarosiphon major*)
For comparison



References and further reading:

Caffrey, J.M., Millane, M., Evers, S., Moran, H. and Butler, M. (2010) A novel approach to aquatic weed control and habitat restoration using biodegradable jute matting. *Aquatic Invasions*, 5(2), 123-129. <http://www.nerc-wallingford.ac.uk/research/capm/pdf%20files/23%20Lagarosiphon%20major.pdf>

Preston, C D and Croft, J M (1997) "*Aquatic plants in Britain and Ireland*". Harley Books

Preston, C D, Pearman, D A and Dines, T A (editors) (2002) "*New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*". Oxford University Press

Stace, C (1999) "*Field Flora of the British Isles*". Cambridge University Press

Photos from: Joanne Denyer.

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

Adapted for Northern Ireland Environment Agency 2020