

# Water Lettuce

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## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Pistia stratiotes*

**Native to:** Africa

**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds and slow moving streams

A perennial plant floating on the surface of the water with long feathery roots hanging beneath the floating leaves. It has thick, soft, matt, light green leaves with a pronounced corrugated surface that form a rosette. It is unlikely to be confused with any other plants.

As the plant reproduces vegetatively from runners, dense floating mats are rapidly formed. These lead to the majority of problems encountered with water lettuce, including blocking waterways, hindering navigation and impeding water flow and flood control efforts.

Mats can also disrupt natural ecosystems by lowering the concentration of oxygen and preventing air-breathing aquatic insects from reaching the water surface. Thick mats can prevent sunlight from passing into the water and reduce water temperature. These negative characteristics can cause a loss of biodiversity.

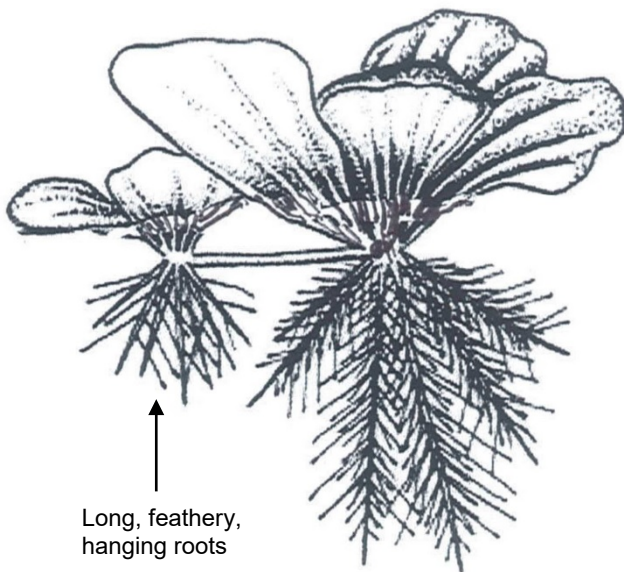
Water Lettuce is not currently present in the wild in Northern Ireland.

***Pistia stratiotes* is listed under Schedule 9 of The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and as such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.**

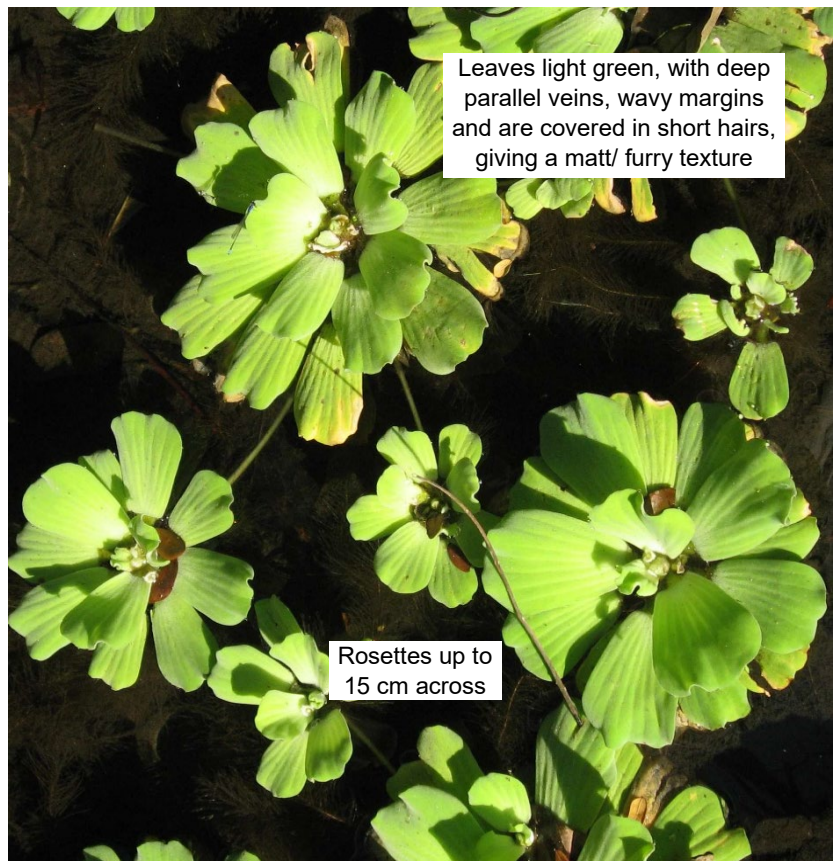


## Key ID Features

Flowers are few, inconspicuous and up to 1.5 cm long



Source: University of Florida/IFAS  
Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants



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>



## Identification throughout the year

Dies back over winter in Britain as temperature drops. Flowers in late summer to early winter but unlikely to be seen.

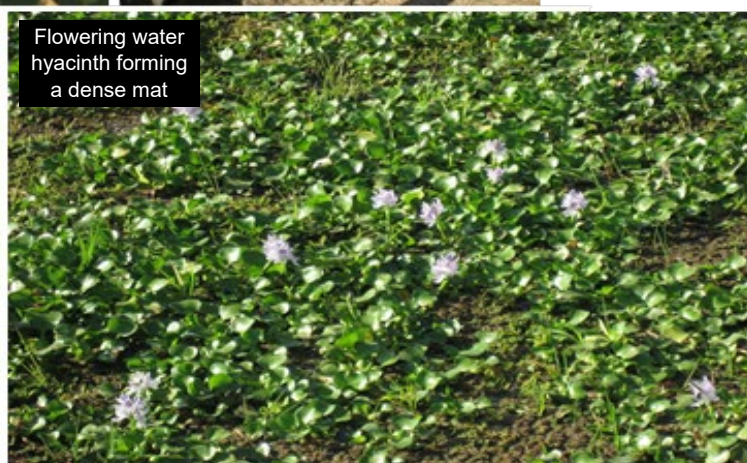
## Distribution

Water lettuce is found as transient populations where it is released into the wild but has not persisted.

## Similar Species

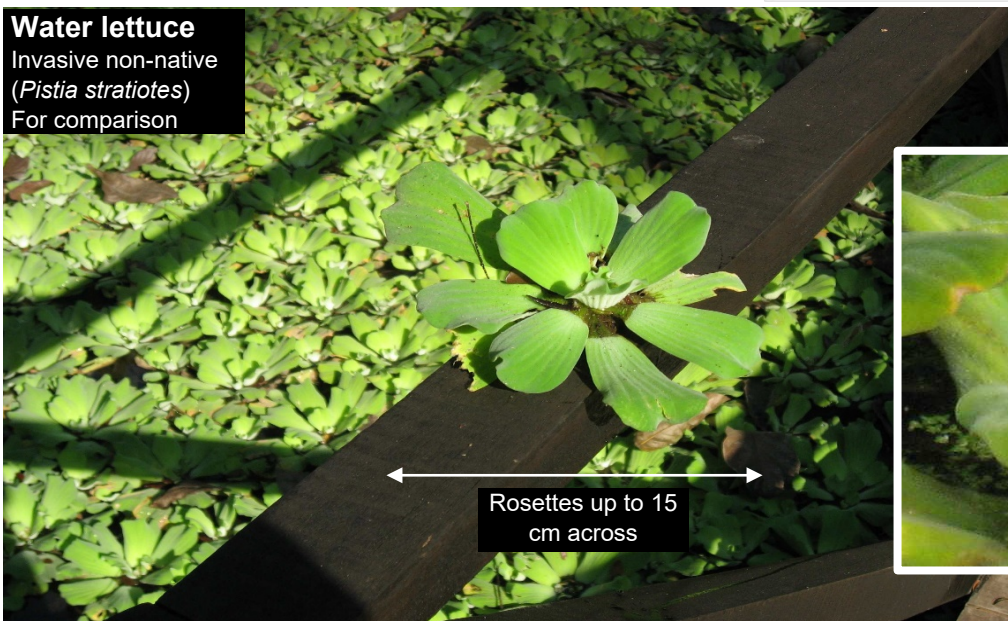
### Water Hyacinth

Non-native  
(*Eichhornia crassipes*)



### Water lettuce

Invasive non-native  
(*Pistia stratiotes*)  
For comparison



### References and further reading:

CABI datasheet *Pistia stratiotes* (water lettuce) available at <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/41496>

*Pistia stratiotes*. Global invasive species database. <http://www.iucngisd.org/gisd/species.php?sc=285>

Photos from: Max Wade.

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Adapted for Northern Ireland  
Environment Agency 2020