

# Parrot's Feather

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## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Myriophyllum aquaticum*

**AKA:** Brazilian Watermilfoil, *Myriophyllum brasiliense*, *Myriophyllum proserpinacoides*, *Myriophyllum propium*

**Native to:** Central and South America

**Habitat:** Still or slowly flowing water

Aquatic perennial, grows in emergent and submerged form. Both forms are similar in appearance. Emergent growth, blue-green colour and feather-like leaves make this a distinctive water plant, which is present year round.

Established in some lakes and ponds across Northern Ireland. Occurs in eutrophic ponds, ditches, reservoirs, canals and flooded mineral workings; it also occasionally occurs in flowing waters.

Introduced as a garden pond plant, it has since spread by improper disposal. Although traders are not permitted to purchase or sell this species, it is still found in some garden centers, often under one of its pseudonyms. Spreads by vegetative fragmentation, seeds are not produced in Northern Ireland.

Causes flooding by blocking watercourses and drainage channels. Can rapidly dominate a water body displacing native species.

**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 Parrot's feather; or to release it into the environment.**



## Key ID Features

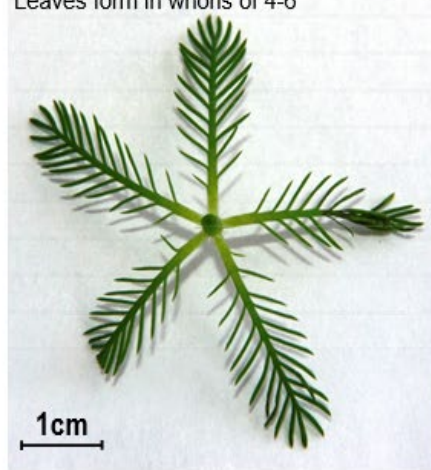
Changes form depending on the conditions, varying between submerged to emergent foliage. Both forms are similar in appearance. Emergent leaves are stiff, bright green and the most distinctive form. Submerged leaves are more fragile and, after death, decompose quickly.

Leaves bright to blue-grey green



Stem breaks easily, brown roots present around nodes

Leaves form in whorls of 4-6



1cm



Stems can grow to 2m tall

Emergent leaves more robust

Forms inconspicuous flowers at base of leaves between May and August. Small (2mm) and white. Can be difficult to see.



Finely divided leaves, feather-like

## Identification throughout the year

Dies down in winter, can be found submerged throughout the year. Emergent shoots appear in spring when the plant becomes more conspicuous. Blue-green colour of leaves is useful for identification. Flowers are present from May to August, but are inconspicuous.

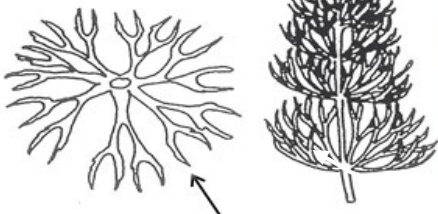
## Similar Species

The emergent stems of parrot's feather distinguish it from native water-milfoil species (spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, alternate water-milfoil *Myriophyllum alterniflorum* and whorled water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum*) which are never emergent, although the native species can produce short emergent flower spikes. Parrot's feather is also rarely, if ever, found in fast flowing water, unlike some native water-milfoil species. Submerged parrot's feather is difficult to distinguish from these species and expert assistance may be required.

Other species that can be confused with parrot's feather:

### Hornwort species

Native and non-native  
(*Ceratophyllum species*)

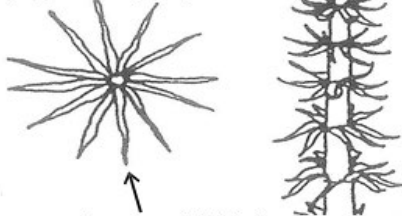


Leaves have 'tuning fork' ends



### Mares Tail

Native  
(*Hippuris vulgaris*)

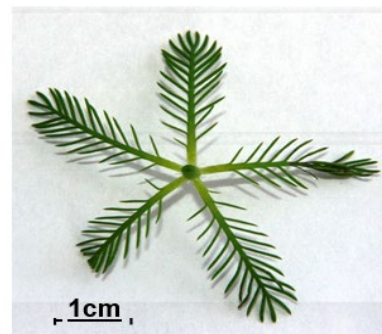


Leaves not divided



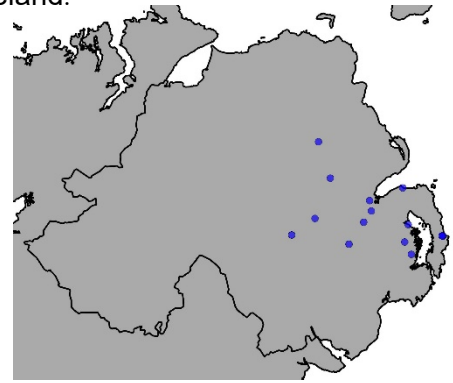
### Parrot's Feather

(and other *Myriophyllum* species)  
For comparison



## Distribution

Mainly recorded in the east of Northern Ireland.



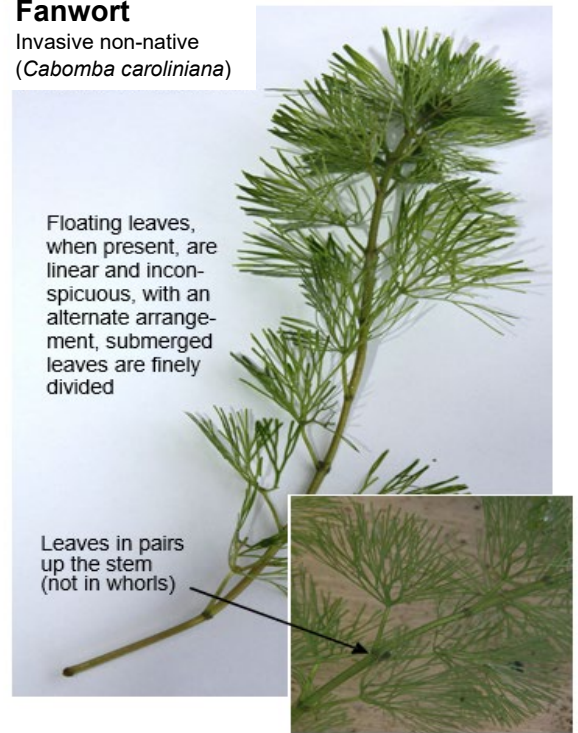
Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland - available  
<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000460832>  
Check website for current distribution.

### Fanwort

Invasive non-native  
(*Cabomba caroliniana*)

Floating leaves, when present, are linear and inconspicuous, with an alternate arrangement, submerged leaves are finely divided

Leaves in pairs up the stem (not in whorls)



### References and further reading:

Blamey, M, Fitter, R and Fitter, A (2003) "The Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland. The Complete Guide to the British and Irish Flora." A & C Black  
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: Olaf Booy, Alisdair Mason, Kristian Peters, Max Wade.