



# Yellow Flag Iris

## ABOUT YELLOW FLAG IRIS

Yellow flag iris, is a perennial aquatic plant that was introduced to North America in the 1800s as an ornamental for ponds and water gardens. The plant has since spread to many waterways, especially those associated with homeowners and recreational properties.

Yellow flag iris can grow in both treed and open wetlands, along river and lake edges, and on floodplains. Stands of yellow iris develop thick (over 20 cm) organic mats of tuberous-like underground stems (rhizomes), forming dense monocultures that push out sedges and rushes, a critical food source for migratory and overwintering birds. Additionally, when the thick organic mat buries rocky shorelines, aquatic invertebrate (insect) abundance is drastically reduced. Aquatic insects are the foundation of the food chain, supporting fish, amphibians, and birds.

Yellow flag iris can quickly form new colonies from seeds that float for over a year, and from rhizome fragments.



### DISTRICT OF CLEARWATER

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## A GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION AND ERADICATION FOR LANDOWNERS IN THE DISTRICT OF CLEARWATER

### IDENTIFICATION

- Flowers have three drooping, deep-yellow sepals with purple-brown markings that look like large petals. The large sepals surround three smaller upright petals.
- Yellow flag iris is the only iris in North America with entirely yellow flowers.
- Flowers bloom between April and July at the top of stems 30 cm to 1.5 m tall that grow in groups of two to ten.
- Leaves are flattened, sword-like, 2-3 cm wide and up to 1 metre long, fanning out from the base like a “hand of cards”.
- Reddish-brown seeds are flattened, like round corn kernels, and closely packed in rows within small banana shaped pods 4-8 cm long.

### PREVENTION

- Do not purchase or trade yellow flag iris
- Avoid disturbing infested areas

DEEP-YELLOW SEPALS WITH PURPLE-BROWN MARKINGS



# Yellow Flag Iris Is One Of The Top Seven Most Invasive Plants in BC

## MECHANICAL CONTROL

Very small infestations of less than 1m<sup>2</sup> can be controlled through hand digging, but caution must be exercised to ensure rhizome fragmentation does not occur. Aggressive cutting to the base of the plant may be effective if repeated yearly. Seed heads can also be cut and bagged to prevent seed production. Wear gloves and long sleeved shirts, as this plant can cause skin irritation.

The most effective treatment to date is a combination of aggressive cutting and pondliner. Cutting the plants to the base and covering with a rubber or PVC based pondliner can kill the rhizomes within 4-6 months. The rhizomes appear to die more quickly in wetter sites than dry, upland sites.

### TO USE THIS TREATMENT:

- As soon as possible in the spring, cut the plants within 2–5 cm of the base.
- Cover the cut area with rubber or PVC based pond liner – tarps or plastic sheets will not work.
- Extend the pond liner 20cm past the perimeter of the infested area to ensure all rhizomes are covered. Ensure there are no open seams or loose edges for the iris to sneak out.
- Use lots of rocks to secure the pond liner to the soil surface, make sure no air bubbles under the liner exist.
- Dig a trench and push the liner into the ground similar to tucking in sheets on a bed. In heavy soil, long spikes with washers will also secure the liner.
- Remove the liner when the rhizomes have turned dark brown/black and mushy.



LIVING RHIZOME



DEAD RHIZOME



Cut the plants within 2–5 cm of the base



Cover area with pond liner. Secure to soil surface and tuck-in edges.



Securing liner with spikes in heavy soil

Mechanical control photography, Jason Jobin – BC Wildlife Federation



## CHEMICAL CONTROL

**!** *There are no chemicals approved for use within 10 m of a waterway*

## DISPOSAL

- Any rhizomes must be bagged and disposed of at a landfill. Stockpiled rhizomes can remain viable for more than a year.
- Cut leaves can remain on site as they will not form new plants.
- Any cut stems with pods should be bagged and disposed of at a landfill to prevent spread through seed dispersal.

## COMMON LOOK-ALIKE

When not in flower, yellow flag iris and the native cattail (*Typha latifolia*) can be difficult to distinguish. The two species tend to grow in similar environments.

Look closely at the leaves and the difference will become clear. Yellow flag iris has leaves that radiate out from the base like a 'hand of cards', whereas cattail leaves come together at the base to form a circle.

The leaves of yellow flag iris have a distinctive rib that runs down the middle, whereas cattail does not. The base of yellow flag iris leaves are a dark reddish-purple, whereas cattail is cream coloured.



FLATTENED IRIS LEAF WITH RIB (LEFT) VERSUS CURVED CATTAIL LEAF (RIGHT)



IRIS LEFT – CATTAIL RIGHT



DETAIL OF CATTAIL



A STAND OF CATTAILS

**Infestations are mainly found in waterways associated with residential areas**

If you spot Yellow Flag Iris, report the location right away. Report online at [reportweedbc.ca](http://reportweedbc.ca), email us at [admin@docbc.ca](mailto:admin@docbc.ca) or call 250-674-2257.