



Exotic Plant Watch

Are invasive plants threatening your lake?

Aren't plants good for a lake?

Rooted aquatic plants are a natural and essential part of the lake, just as grasses, shrubs and trees are a natural part of the land. However, sometimes a lake is invaded by an aquatic plant species that is not native to Michigan. Some of these exotic plants, like Curly-leaf Pondweed, Eurasian Milfoil, and Hydrilla can be extremely disruptive to the lake's ecosystem and recreational activities.

These exotic plants can "take over" a lake by crowding out beneficial native species. An overabundance of the exotic species can negatively affect fish populations and human recreation.

What steps are needed to prevent exotic plants from taking over my lake?

To avoid having a lake invaded and overrun with exotic plants, the Exotic Plant Watch Program of the Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP) teaches volunteers how to use the five Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies:

1. Monitoring

The critical step in stopping the spread of exotic plants is to find them before they spread out across the lake.

Through the Exotic Plant Watch, a plant expert from MiCorps teaches volunteers how to sample their lake for exotic plants and how to identify them. Participants also have the opportunity to mail questionable or unknown plant samples to MiCorps for identification.

In a nutshell, the monitoring procedure involves:

- 1) Using a lake depth map to establish sampling transects.
- 2) Using a sampling rake to take plant samples at particular depths on each transect.
- 3) At each sampling point, four samples are taken from the boat at the twelve, three, six, and nine o'clock positions.
- 4) Identifying the sampled plants and assigning a relative abundance.

Annual monitoring of the lake for exotic plants can determine if any are present in the lake, and their location and abundance. If monitoring is done frequently and carefully it should be able to detect the first invasion colonies of an exotic plant.

2. Early Detection

Finding the first colonies of an exotic plant invasion will permit a rapid response to control the plant in small areas before it can spread.

If the invasion goes undetected in a few years it may cover large areas of the lake.

3. Rapid Response

Responding rapidly to a new invasion of an exotic plant will increase the probability of keeping the plant under control, possibly even eradicating it. Treating small infested areas will be less expensive and more effective than treating large areas after the plant has spread.

4. Maintenance Control

Continually monitoring and treating the exotic plant is time consuming and requires persistence and dedication, but it can keep the plant's population at low, manageable levels. The alternative is to "give up" and let the exotic plant populations expand to cover large areas of the lake, after which control will be very expensive.

5. Preventive Management

Even if the monitoring does not reveal the presence of exotic plants, the lake community should still continue their monitoring efforts. Remember, the key to prevent invasive plant growth is to find them before they take over the lake.

