

WATER CHESTNUT RAPIDLY CHANGES HABITAT AND DEGRADES WATER QUALITY

Water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) is a highly competitive aquatic grass-like sedge that grows in marshy areas, preferably in muddy conditions with slow moving waters such as ponds, lakes and shallow streams. A native to Europe, Asia and Africa, the water chestnut was first found in Massachusetts in 1859.

It has since become established in many locations throughout the Northeast and is rapidly spreading. Water chestnut now populates the waters of Lake Champlain and can be found in water bodies in New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Canadian Province of Quebec. It has proven to be a nuisance aquatic invasive species, rapidly causing degraded water quality, deteriorating habitat and posing recreational hazards.

Water chestnut is an annual that dies back each fall. The main plant is typically small, yet numerous branching stems result in plants that can reach 16 feet in length. The

WATER CHESTNUT



Water chestnut grows rapidly each growing season, covering vast areas. Its establishment affects the natural ecology of the water body it infests and reduces the ability to fish, swim and boat.

leaves from the water chestnut are triangular in shape with an air bladder in the stem. The plant is visible above and below the water surface.

Single, small white flowers with four petals in the center of the rosette bloom in mid to late July with nuts (seeds) ripening two months later. A single seed can produce 300 new seeds in a year, equating to enough seeds in one acre of water chestnuts able to cover 100 acres the following year. The nuts are prism in shape with four barbed spines and are viable for 12 years. The nuts are hazardous to public safety, causing injury if stepped on.

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Water Chestnut

LAKE GEORGE FACT SHEET

Water chestnut spreads rapidly through the migration of nuts when the rosette is detached from the plant and floats to a new location or when the nuts are transported by wind and waves. Water bodies with heavy boat traffic aid the spread of this invasive. Water chestnut has the potential to take over large areas once established, blocking sunlight and reducing opportunity for native aquatic plant growth.

In the 1970s a small infestation was found in Lake George and promptly removed. Today extensive infestations in Lake Champlain and surrounding water bodies pose a consistent threat of water chestnut becoming established in Lake George.

The establishment of water chestnut is an extreme threat to the water quality and the recreational management of Lake George. Once the plant takes over an area, rapid sedimentation occurs due to the trapping of silt. Dense beds also cause low oxygen levels from decomposing organic matter.

The infestation of water chestnut reduces opportunities for fishing, swimming and boating. The cost of control has reached millions of dollars in areas where water chestnut has become established.

The key to preventing large dense populations of water chestnut in Lake



Water chestnut nuts are viable for 12 years after ripened and dropped to the lake bottom.

George is early detection and rapid response.

The best way to prevent water chestnut in Lake George or transferring it to other water bodies is:

- Remove any plants or plant segments from your boat.
- Rinse any gear after leaving the water and before going into a new body of water.
- Allow all your equipment and boat to fully dry before transporting it to a new body of water.

We need your help to protect Lake George from invasive species.

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