

Agriculture Protection Board  
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# WATER HYACINTH



**W**ater hyacinth is an extremely troublesome weed of the waterways of the world. It spreads rapidly, making waterways impassable to boats and destroying the habitat of waterbirds and fish. It can cover the entire surface of freshwater lakes, rivers, irrigation channels and drains. The leaves of Water hyacinth transpire much more water into the atmosphere than would be lost by normal evaporation. The decaying organic matter from heavy infestations can make water unfit for livestock or human use. Water hyacinth originated in South America. It was first introduced into Western Australia about 1929 as an ornamental plant. Water hyacinth is a declared plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia. It cannot be propagated and any plants found must be destroyed.

**Description:**

Water hyacinth is a perennial aquatic plant. It makes rapid growth during the summer months. Two types of leaves are produced. Some are long and narrow, standing erect while others are almost round. Both leaf forms are smooth,



1 Dense infestation of water hyacinth.  
 2 Water hyacinth flower

hairless and shiny. The leaf stems have bladder-like swellings consisting of large air-cells which enable the plant to float on water.

In shallow water the plants take root in the mud, but water hyacinth is free floating in deeper water.

Flowering starts in February and continues into March. Flowers are produced in heads 15 to 30 cm long, which consist of about eight individual flowers. The flowers are funnel-shaped with six bluish-purple lobes—the upper one with a yellow marking. After flowering, the heads bend over, submerging the developing fruit.

In areas affected by frost, the aerial growth dies off after flowering, leaving a crown which re-grows in spring.

Seeds are set in February and March. A large number of tiny seeds are produced in each fruit. The seed can stay dormant for many years, making it difficult to eradicate an established infestation. Seeds can be dispersed by water and by birds.

The plant spreads mainly by vegetative reproduction. New plants form at a very rapid rate on horizontal stems or stolons. It has been calculated that the number of plants in an infestation can double every two weeks by this means. Clumps of the weed often break off and float away to form new

*(continued overleaf)*

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*(continued)*  
infestations.

Human encouragement of the plant is the major means of dispersal and the one which has been the hardest

to control. Most new infestations can be traced to pieces of Water hyacinth either discarded from fish ponds or deliberately planted in misguided attempts to beautify waterways.

Prompt action is essential to eradicate isolated patches of Water

hyacinth, to prevent the weed getting established in a new area.

***Suspect plants should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board, Telephone Perth 367 0111 or any country officer of the Agriculture Protection Board or the Department of Agriculture.***