

# The problem with aquatic and foreshore weeds

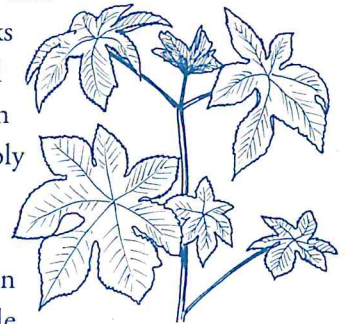


Weeds in the riparian zone and in the water can be a serious problem. A weed is an alien or introduced plant that is invasive.

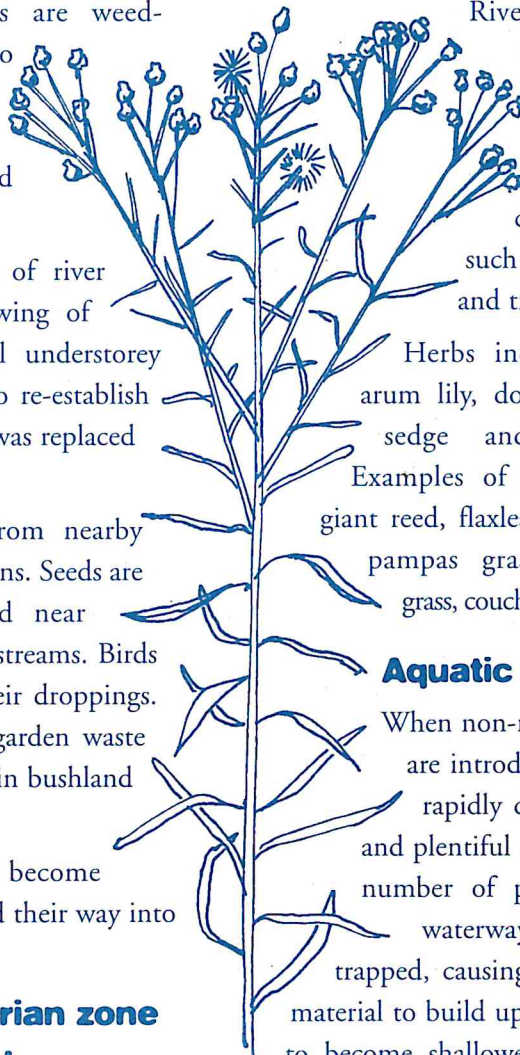
Weeds compete with local plants for space and light. They usually don't suffer from pests or diseases, and animals may not feed on them, so they spread easily. They can overtake the natural vegetation, reducing the diversity of native species and the value of habitats.

Flowers are usually large and colourful. A plant that looks lush and healthy in winter and spring but yellow and dead in summer and autumn is probably an annual pasture grass or herb. Weeds in the riparian

castor oil bush



flaxleaf fleabane



Many old creeklines and open drains are weed-infested due to the clearing of natural vegetation, which has allowed rapid weed growth.

Clearing along the river, grazing of river foreshore areas and constant mowing of parklands has meant that natural understorey vegetation was eventually unable to re-establish itself. In the end the native species was replaced by weeds that enjoy disturbance.

Foreshore weeds mostly come from nearby gardens, farmland and market gardens. Seeds are blown or washed into bushland near streams and into drains leading to streams. Birds can bring them into an area in their droppings. People often thoughtlessly dump garden waste containing seeds, bulbs or cuttings in bushland near the river.

Imported aquarium plants can become dangerous aquatic weeds if they find their way into streams or other wetlands.

## Riparian zone weeds

Weeds in natural bush can be recognised in a number of ways. Their leaves are generally bright green, large, soft or broad, and may drop at one time of the year (meaning the plant is seasonally deciduous).

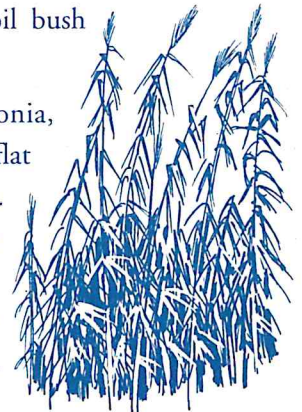


pampas grass

zone of the Swan River include trees such as evergreen chloris, Japanese pepper and the deciduous poplar, twiners or vines such as morning glory and bridal creeper, and bushes such as castor oil bush and tree lucerne.

Herbs include watsonia, arum lily, dock, dense flat sedge and bulrush.

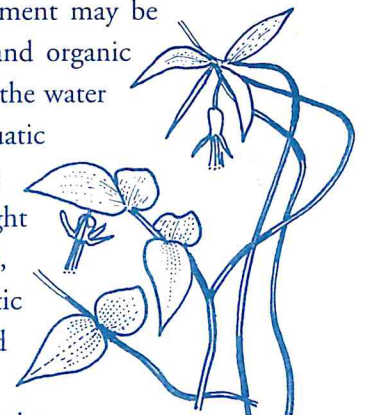
Examples of grasses are giant reed, flaxleaf fleabane, pampas grass, buffalo grass, couch and kikuyu.



giant reed bamboo

## Aquatic weeds

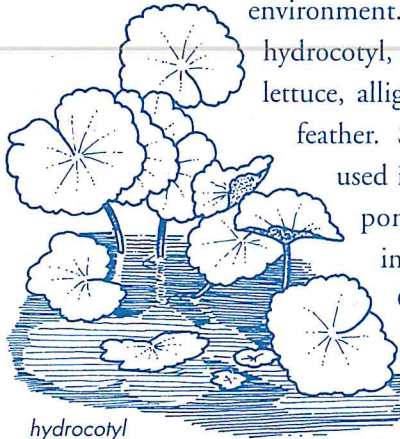
When non-native aquatic plants are introduced to a waterbody they can grow rapidly due to the fresh slow-moving water and plentiful nutrient supply. This can result in a number of problems: weeds may clog the waterway; sediment may be trapped, causing silt and organic material to build up and the water to become shallower; aquatic plants and animals may be deprived of oxygen and light and the water may stagnate, causing the death of aquatic life. Habitats for birds and other animals may also be lost. Recreational areas may be



bridal creeper

ruined and irrigation pumps may become clogged with plant material.

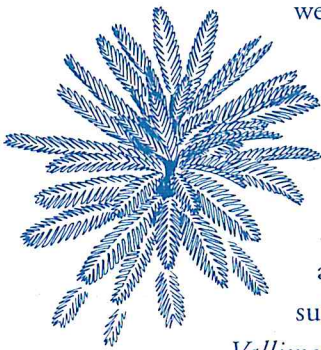
Some weeds are fast-growing and free-floating varieties, which have the potential to do great harm to the environment. Examples are salvinia, hydrocotyl, water hyacinth, water lettuce, alligator weed and parrot's feather. Salvinia (a plant often used in fish tanks and garden ponds) has in the past infested upper parts of the Canning River.



hydrocotyl

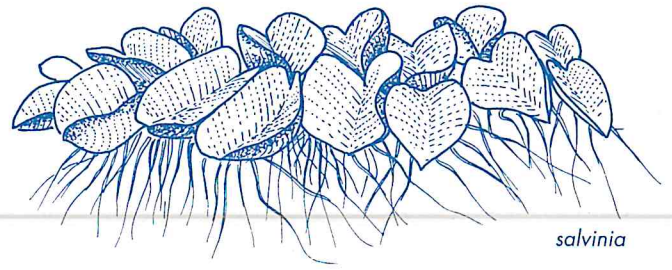
It cannot tolerate saline conditions, so the removal of the boards at Kent Street Weir to flush it downstream into salty water has proved the most effective means of natural control.

Another example is *Hydrocotyl ranunculoides*. A particularly fast-growing noxious weed, it can form dense, deep floating mats. The noxious weed *Sagittaria graminea*, another fishpond plant, has infested some parts of the river.



parrot's feather

Some aquatic weeds are attached to sediment or other substrate. An example is *Vallisneria americana* (ribbon weed) which likes swiftly flowing fresh water and occurs upstream of the Kent Street Weir, particularly in the upper reaches of the Canning. It attaches to the

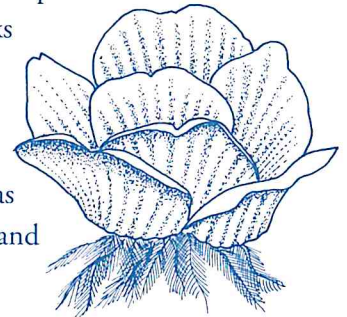


salvinia

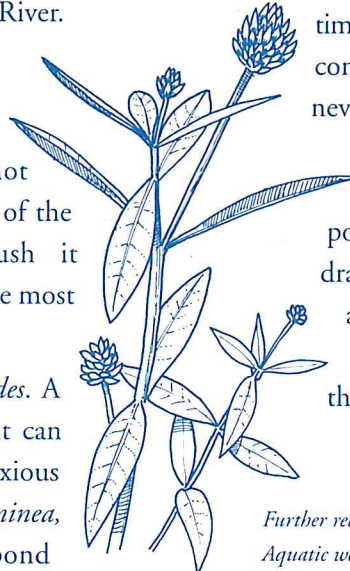
sediment, and its long straplike translucent green leaves grow upward to the surface.

Most outbreaks of aquatic weeds have been successfully treated, but controlling outbreaks is expensive and time-consuming. Removal by hand is the most common approach. It is critical that people never empty aquarium plants

from fish tanks or backyard ponds into rivers or drains, and use safe aquatic plants such as the fern-like azolla and the waterlily.



water lettuce



alligator weed

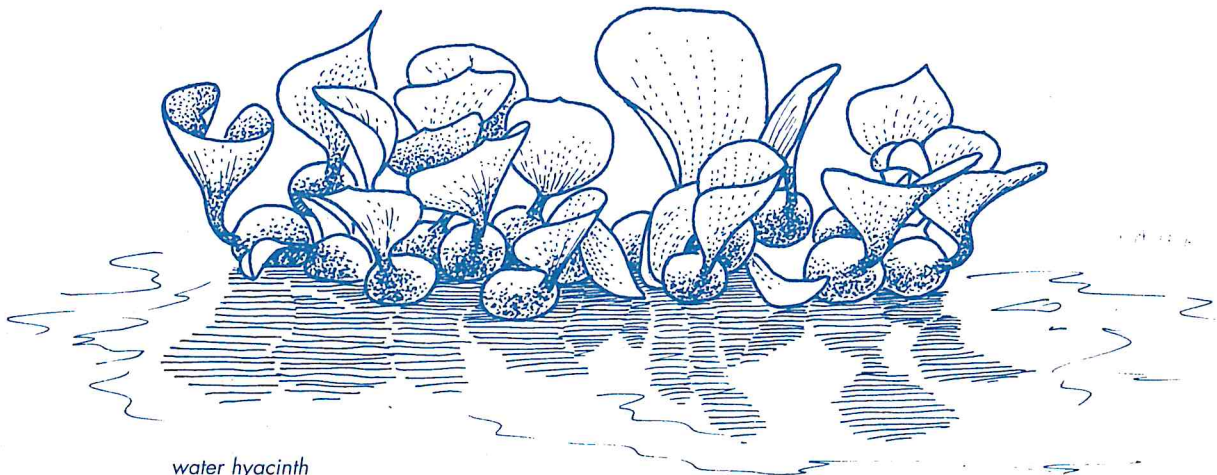
Further reading:

*Aquatic weeds, Water advice No 9, Water and Rivers Commission, 1999.*



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water hyacinth