

Yellow Flag Iris *(Iris pseudacorus)*

INTRODUCTION

Yellow flag iris originated in Europe. Though a relatively new invader to BC's Southern Interior, in recent years it has quickly spread throughout the Okanagan and lower Similkameen valley, Christina Lake and other isolated sites in the West Kootenays. This water-loving plant is found in ditches, irrigation canals, marshes, streams, shorelines and shallow ponds. It is listed as a noxious or invasive weed in six US States including Washington State.

Yellow flag iris prefers saturated soils and fills a similar niche to that of cattails; it often grows alongside this native plant, though usually in less deep water. This fast-growing and fast-spreading invasive plant can outcompete other riparian (water loving) plants, forming almost impenetrable thickets. This yellow iris may also clog waterways and interrupt the natural water filtration services provided by native riparian or aquatic plants.

Unfortunately, yellow flag iris continues to be sold widely in nurseries and on the Internet.

Not transplanting or purchasing this aggressive plant can help to reduce spread.

IDENTIFICATION

- European perennial plant
- Roots prefer to be submerged in water
- Has bright yellow flowers, which appear mid-spring
- Flowers have three sepals that curve backwards and three petals that point up
- Flat upright leaves are sword-shaped and surround the flower stalks
- At maturity, its fruit capsules resemble hanging bunches of short green bananas
- Plants can reach 1.5m in height



Yellow flag iris forms dense monocultures along waterways which trap sediment and alters wildlife habitat. This impacts many riparian dependent species, particularly amphibians and birds.

BIOLOGY

This water-loving, European perennial prefers saturated soils and a moist habitat. Yellow flag iris reproduces by seed and horizontal root systems (rhizomes). The seeds are found in seed pods that resemble short green bananas. While some plant enthusiasts may argue that sterile hybrids of this particular iris species are a good alternative, several nursery owners or managers will disagree, as it is not

unknown for supposedly sterile plants to produce a certain amount of viable seed. Even if seeds are not produced, hundreds of irises are usually rhizomatously connected under the water and fragments can break off and float downstream to start a new plant. Therefore, even complete elimination of seed production will not prevent its spread.



Seed pods resemble green bananas

ALTERNATIVES

Consider planting other wetland plants such as native cattail or non-invasive iris species such as Iris Louisiana mix or True Blue.

If a yellow hue is preferred, then plant Marsh Marigold or yellow water lily.

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT

The best overall method of control for yellow flag iris is an integrated program using a combination of control methods as these aquatic invaders are extremely persistent and have an extensive root system.



PREVENTION

The most effective way to ensure that your riparian areas do not become infested with yellow flag iris is by prevention. Here are some recommendations to prevent yellow flag iris from invading your property:

- Learn to identify yellow flag iris and other invasive plants.
- Do not purchase, grow or trade yellow flag iris.
- Do not plant these plants by your ponds, waterfront shorelines, or any other wetland areas.
- Cooperate with adjacent landowners and encourage them to prevent yellow flag iris spread.
- Immediately re-vegetate disturbed area with native plants such as Cattail (*Typha latifolia*) or other non-invasive iris species (Louisiana mix or True Blue) or marsh marigold or yellow water lily to provide dense, early colonization to prevent weed invasion.

PHYSICAL CONTROL

Removal of small infestations can be attempted manually by pulling or digging, but note that resinous substances in the leaves and rhizomes can cause skin irritation, so wear gloves and appropriate clothing. Clipping of the flower heads prior to the plant going to seed will reduce the number of viable seeds and therefore the number of plants that could become established. Extensive infestations can mean that machines, such as a backhoe, may be the only option; however, they are not always appropriate such as in sensitive areas like stream beds, as they can cause extensive disturbance and allow for the invasion of other unwanted plants. No matter what control options are chosen, all plant pieces should be carefully removed to avoid spread of rhizome fragments that could start new plants. Be sure to dispose of all invasive plant material in bags that will undergo deep burial at a landfill.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

There is no current biological control for this species. It has been found that grazing animals have minimal impact on the plants, as deer eat it sparingly and it has been found that yellow flag iris sickens cattle by causing gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines).

Under the federal **Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada** (DFO) *Fisheries Act*, it states a project targeted at the removal of an invasive non-native aquatic species, such as the yellow flag iris, below the high water mark is permissible without DFO review. This is only applicable if no dredging or mechanical disturbance of the bottom of the lake occurs and if all aspects of the *Measures to protect Fish and Fish Habitat during small-scale Aquatic Vegetation Removal* list are incorporated. Visit www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca for more information.

For further information on invasive plants in the Okanagan-Similkameen, go to: www.oasiss.ca

To learn about invasive plants elsewhere in BC, go to:

www.weedsbc.ca or www.bcinvatives.ca

For more information about the Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Program please contact the Regional District at 250-492-0237 or toll free at 1-877-610-3737.