

Water Lettuce

Species Description

Scientific name: *Pistia stratiotes*

AKA: Letys dŵr (Welsh)

Native to: Africa

Habitat: Lakes, ponds and slow moving streams

A perennial plant floating on the surface of the water with long feathery roots hanging beneath the floating leaves. It has thick, soft, matt, light green leaves with a pronounced corrugated surface that form a rosette. It is unlikely to be confused with any other plants.

As the plant reproduces vegetatively from runners, dense floating mats are rapidly formed. These lead to the majority of problems encountered with water lettuce, including blocking waterways, hindering navigation and impeding water flow and flood control efforts. Mats can also disrupt natural ecosystems by lowering the concentration of oxygen and preventing air-breathing aquatic insects from reaching the water surface. Thick mats can prevent sunlight from passing into the water and reduce water temperature. These negative characteristics can cause a loss of biodiversity. Not frost tolerant in the UK and so not currently considered to be an invasive risk.

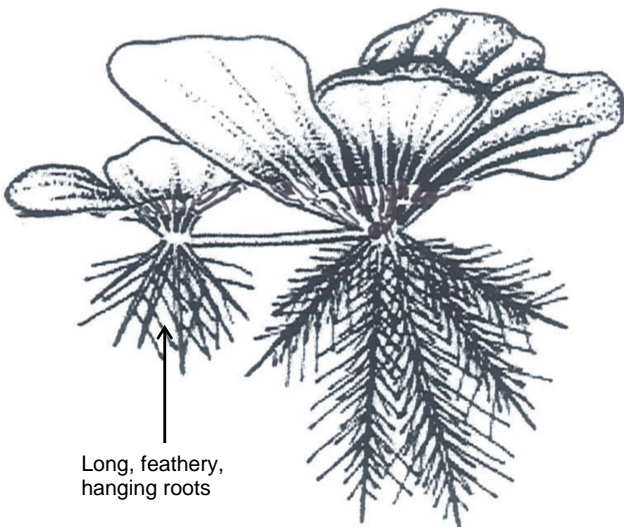
Water lettuce is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.

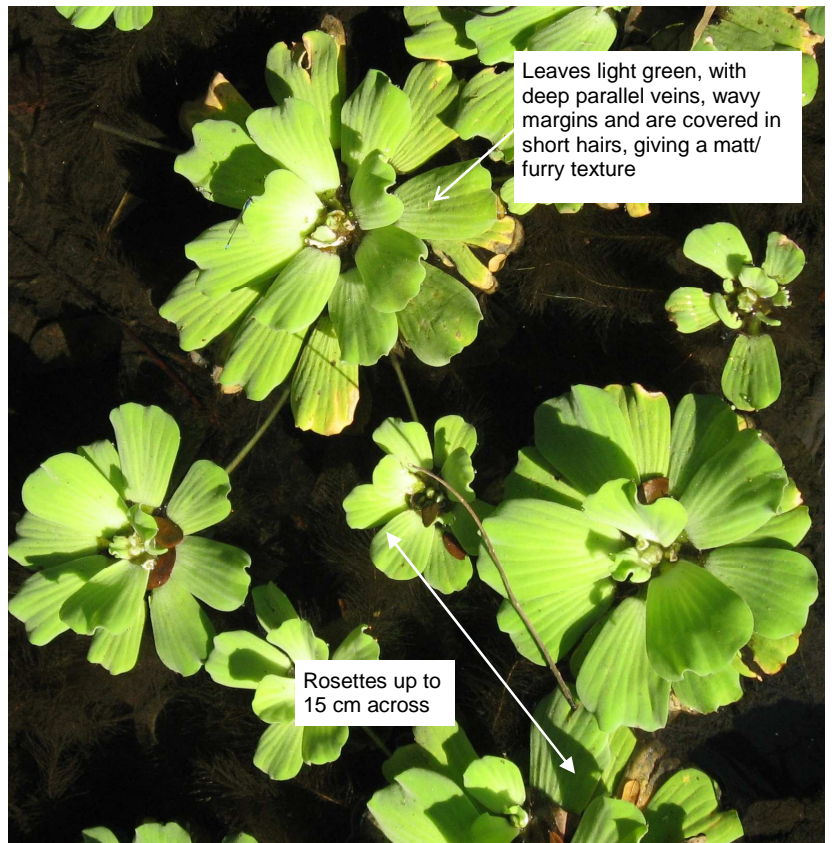


Key ID Features

Flowers are few, inconspicuous and up to 1.5 cm long



Long, feathery, hanging roots



Leaves light green, with deep parallel veins, wavy margins and are covered in short hairs, giving a matt/furry texture

Rosettes up to 15 cm across

Identification throughout the year

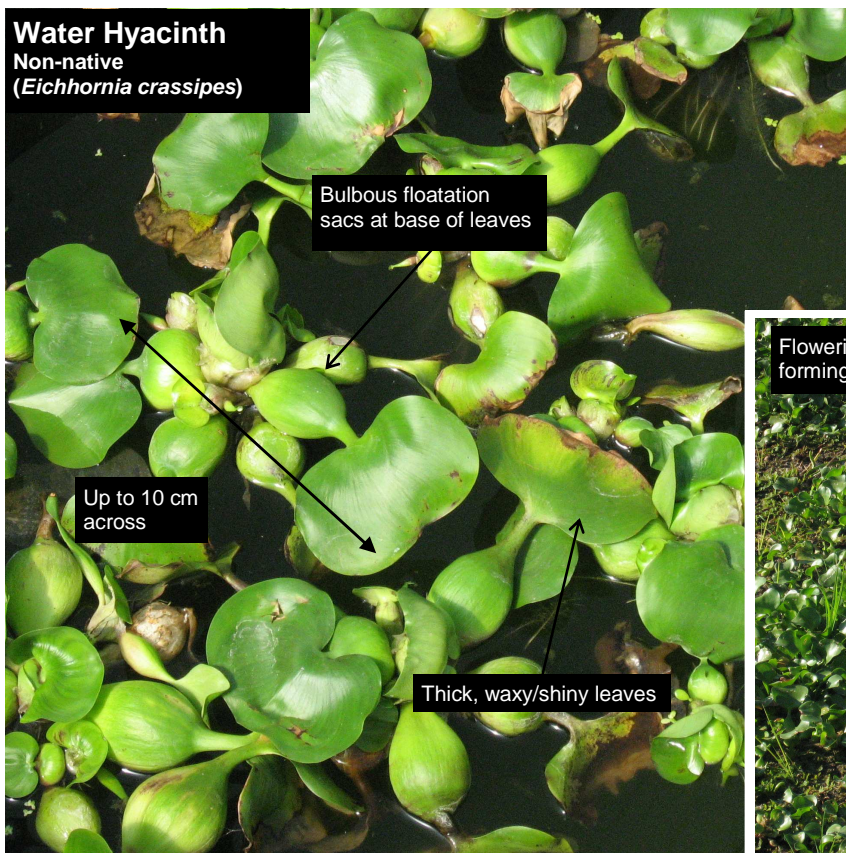
Dies back over winter in Britain as temperature drops.
Flowers in late summer to early winter but unlikely to be seen.

Distribution

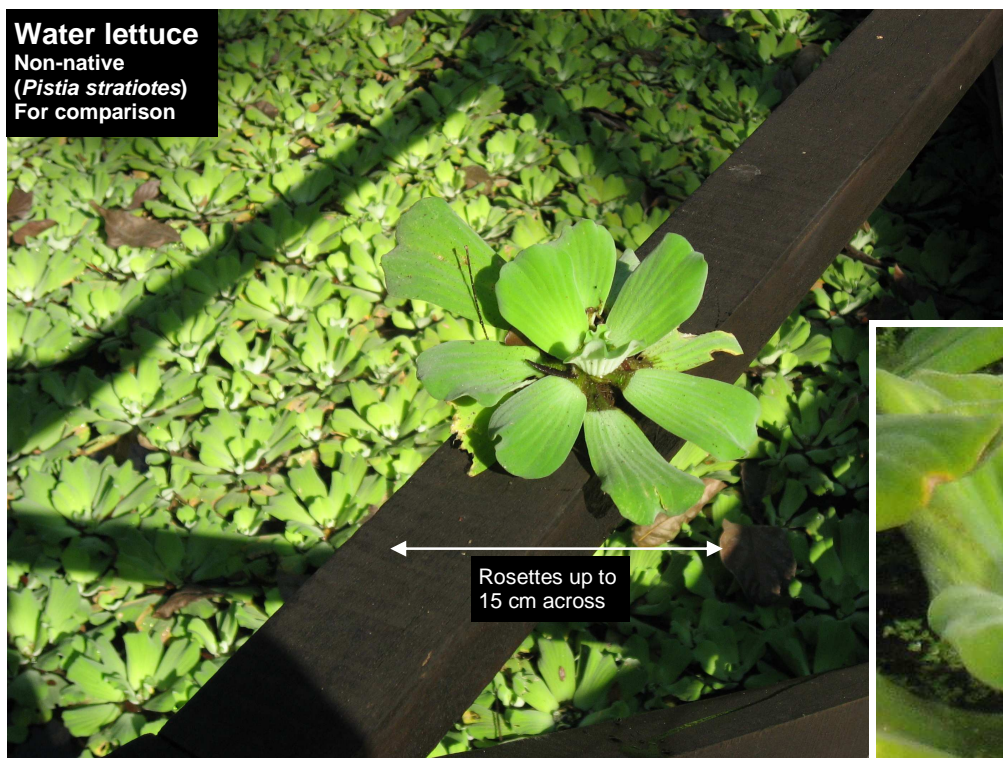
Water lettuce is found as transient populations where it is released into the wild but has not persisted.

Similar Species

Water Hyacinth
Non-native
(*Eichhornia crassipes*)



Water lettuce
Non-native
(*Pistia stratiotes*)
For comparison



Furry leaves



References and further reading:

Pistia stratiotes. Global invasive species database.
www.issg.org