Pond Check

Information & Management

ERCCIS

NEW ZEALAND PIGMYWEED (*Crassula helmsii*)

Photos: Environment Agency

Information

New Zealand pigmyweed was introduced to Britain in 1911 from Tasmania. This species is extremely invasive due to its vigorous rate of growth and the ability to spread via vegetative propagation. It is often sold as an "oxygenator" and/or under a range of names (*Tillaea recurva, Tillaea helmsii*, Australian swap stonecrop) making it difficult to identify and avoid. This species has been added to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act making it illegal to cause it to grow in the wild and proposals are being considered for a ban on sale to prevent further introductions.

New Zealand pigmyweed can grow around the damp margins of ponds and in water up to three metres deep. A small tussock on sediment can soon spread to form a dense mat of vegetation, out-competing native plants and causing deterioration of wildlife habitat. Mats can clog up drainage systems, increasing the risk of flooding and can reduce the recreational value of water bodies. The plant is tolerant of desiccation and frost, growing throughout the year with no dormant period.

Spread is vegetative, by stem fragments; a new plant can generate from a fragment as small as 5mm. These can be spread by flowing water, in mud, attachment to animals and equipment and as a contaminant of compost when purchasing or moving other water plants

Management

This plant should be removed and carefully disposed of. The best time to carry out pond maintenance to minimise the impact on wildlife is during late autumn.

Removal is more successful if carried out during the early stages of establishment and in doing so helps retain more of the native flora. Once New Zealand pigmyweed becomes well-established it can be extremely difficult to control.

Where possible, it is advisable to section off the infestation with a fragment proof fence/ barrier to prevent wider spread of fragments

when carrying out any maintenance that causes disturbance. Repeated control may be required but avoid carrying out pond maintenance during the breeding season for birds, fish, invertebrates reptiles and amphibians.
Always inspect and clean equipment to prevent transferring material.

Manual

New Zealand pigmyweed is shallow rooted so hand pulling or dredging marginal and emergent material can be effective. Cutting is NOT recommended as this has the potential to spread stem fragments.

Shading terrestrial or emergent forms with an opaque material such as thick black polythene or carpet for at least three months may be effective for small areas. Be careful that this does not deplete the water of oxygen by only partially shading the pond.

Always ensure that nutrient levels are controlled to prevent excessive growth.

Chemical

Avoid the use of herbicides as they also target native species.

If necessary, only use products approved for use on or near water and always follow the product label.

Agreement must be obtained from the environment Agency before herbicides are applied in, on or near controlled waters.

Disposal

Removed vegetation should be composted either on your own compost heap or via a civic amenity waste disposal site. A hot compost heap will destroy plant fragments.

The composting material should be covered to retain heat and prevent material inadvertently being distributed to the wider environment. Alternatively, place on a membrane, allow to dry and then burn.
If you are concerned about removing wildlife with the vegetation make sure you rinse it off either by swilling it around the pond or in a separate bucket of pond water. You can leave the vegetation by the side of the pond to allow wildlife to re-enter but this should be transferred after a couple of days to prevent nutrients entering the pond.

DO	DON'T
Remove your invasive species	Dump in the countryside
Compost	Dispose of down the drain or in a watercourse
Burn	Transfer plants or animals between ponds
	Give surplus pond plant to friends

FURTHER GUIDANCE ON NON NATIVE SPECIES

www.nonnativespecies.org

http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Leisure/GEHO0307BLZO-e-e(1).pdf

http://www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/AquaticPlantManagement.html