

Aquatic plants are not just weeds!

To many people, the term aquatic plant is synonymous with “weed”, but nothing could be further from the truth. Aquatic plants are a natural and important part of the aquatic ecosystem, forming the basis of all food webs.

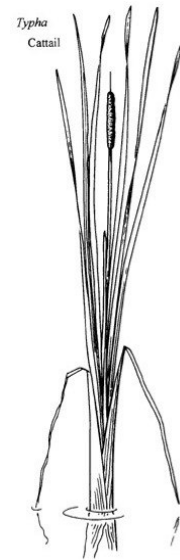
Aquatic plants perform many functions, all of which benefit our water quality and our watershed. Aquatic plants stabilize soil, trap sediments and protect shorelines from erosion, acting to keep the water clear.

Aquatic plants supply oxygen and absorb nutrients and toxins, keeping the water clean. They also provide nesting sites for birds, habitat for fish and food for wildlife, keeping the watershed healthy and productive.

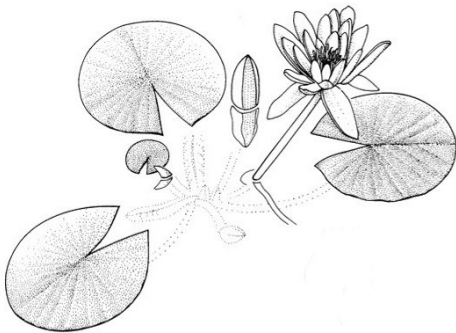
Types of aquatic plants

There are three main types of aquatic plants – emergent, floating, and submerged.

Emergent plants extend above the water surface in shallow areas of lakes, ponds and ditches. They have relatively rigid stems and do not rely on the water for support. Emergent plants common in Muskoka include cattails (*Typha spp.*), Multicoloured blue flag (*Iris versicolor*), and pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*).



Nymphaea spp.
Water lily



Floating aquatic plants may be rooted or free-floating. Free-floating plants obtain their nutrients directly from the water. Rooted floating plants lack stem rigidity and depend on the water for support. Free-floating plants found in Muskoka include the common duckweed (*Lemna minor*) and the star duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*). Rooted floating plants include white water lily (*Nymphaea odorata*) and water smartweed (*Polygonum amphibium*).

Submerged aquatic plants have flexible stems and leaves, are rooted in the sediments, and are completely covered by water. However, some species have flowers that extend above the surface. Common bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*) and tape grass (*Vallisneria americana*) are both found in Muskoka.



Too many aquatic plants

High densities of aquatic plants may be an indicator of water quality problems. If your waterbody seems to support too many plants, it may mean that there are too many nutrients, especially phosphorus, entering the water. Removing aquatic plants without addressing the

sources of nutrient enrichment will not reduce the amount of aquatic vegetation in your waterbody over the long-term.

Before you can remove aquatic vegetation, it is necessary to obtain the appropriate permits and approvals. Aquatic vegetation is considered fish habitat and, as such, is protected under the federal *Fisheries Act*. Failing to obtain the necessary permits before removing any aquatic vegetation can result in substantial fines, the risk of imprisonment, and a requirement to cover the costs of returning the site to its original state.

Enjoy your aquatic plants – learn to identify them and understand how they work to protect your water quality. A healthy watershed requires aquatic plants.

