

Yellow Flag Iris *Iris pseudacorus*



Iris pseudacorus

When I think of iris, I immediately think of the beautiful Bearded Iris, Siberian Iris and Japanese Iris, but there is a noxious one in this family. Yellow flag or *Iris pseudacorus* is a class C noxious weed in the State of Washington. This iris has become one of the wetland botanical bullies along with purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*). Yellow flag iris, just like purple loosestrife, is a garden ornamental that has escaped.

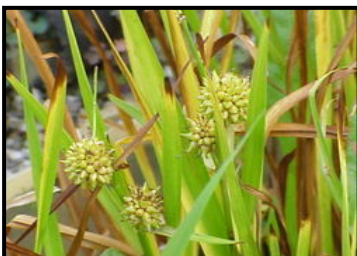
Yellow flag is a perennial that is native to Europe, Great Britain, North Africa and the Mediterranean region. It appears everywhere in the United States except in the Rocky Mountains. It can be found in wetlands or along the edge of ponds, lakes or slow moving streams or rivers. It is usually found in very shallow water or mud. It will tolerate drying, some salinity, and high soil acidity (ph of 3.6 to 7.7).

Yellow flag is found growing in part shade or full sun exposure. This plant with its showy yellow flowers blooms in the late spring or early summer. The flowers resemble the garden iris, except the sepals are often streaked with brown to purple lines. The leaves are basal and are folded, clasping the stem at the base in a fan-like fashion. The leaves stand erect or bent at the top with shorter leaves appearing toward the outside of the plant. This plant will sometimes remain green during mild winters, but will die back in harsh winter conditions with the rhizomes over-wintering just fine.

Like its garden cousins, yellow flag iris spreads by rhizomes and grows in a tight clump. Unlike other irises, the rhizomes can connect several hundred flowering plants. If a small rhizome fragment breaks off, it can drift with the water to another location to form a new plant. It is so invasive, with the rhizomes forming such dense stands, that it can force out native wetland species, including the aggressive common cattail (*Typha latifolia*). These dense rhizomes masses trap sediment, which reduces water flow, affecting fish, plants, and animals. In addition to reproducing by rhizomes, it also reproduces from its flat brown seeds that are contained in a large fruit capsule that are 3-angled and a glossy green color.



Typha latifolia



Sparganium eurycarpum

Yellow flag is the only yellow iris found in Washington's wet areas. When it is not flowering it can be confused with cattail (*Typha latifolia*) or broad-fruited bur-reed (*Sparganium eurycarpum*). The best way to distinguish between these plants is to look for the yellow flag fruits in the summer or the fan-shaped plant-base at other times of the year.

No herbicide control is listed for yellow flag iris. Even if there is a labeled herbicide for yellow flag control, an aquatic license would be required because it grows in and around aquatic areas. When pulling or digging yellow flag for mechanical control, gloves should be worn to protect the skin because the resins in the leaves and rhizome can cause skin irritation. It is also very important to remove every last piece of the rhizome because a new plant can grow from this small piece. Burning is mentioned for cultural control, but the seeds will germinate if the burning is done in late summer and the rhizomes are still viable after burning. No biological control work has been done for yellow flag iris.

Yellow flag, because of its pretty yellow flowers, is often used as an ornamental pond plant and can be purchased at nurseries and on the internet. Some better alternatives are:

- Japanese Iris, *Iris ensata* ‘Variegata’ and cultivars—beautiful iris for pond edges and bogs. Flowers are white, purple, and violet blue.
- Laevigata Iris, *Iris laevigata*,--a true water-loving iris that is beautiful in and out of flower. Flowers are white, purple, lavender, and pink with yellow varieties being very rare.
- Siberian Iris, *Iris sibirica*, hybrids such as ‘Butter & Sugar’, ‘Sunfisher’ have yellow blooms—suitable for damp sites, but not for standing water. In addition to yellow, flowers range from white to purple to blue-purple.



Iris ensata
‘Variegata’



Iris laevigata



Iris sibirica
‘Butter and Cream’

RESOURCES:

Garden Wise—Non-Invasive Plants for Your Garden

Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board <http://www.nwcb.wa.gov>