

NATIVE AQUATIC PLANTS

OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN



Aquatic plants are a common sight in the Lake Champlain Basin's waterbodies, yet the roles native species play in aquatic ecosystems are undervalued. Too often, they are viewed as weeds, rather than important parts of freshwater lake ecology. Aquatic flora provide habitat for fish, birds, and invertebrates and are key in the chemical and physical ecological function of Lake Champlain. They also have long-existing and continued relationships with people as food, medicine, building materials, in ecological restoration, and more. Here, we've highlighted 15 aquatic plants native to Lake Champlain, including one of the world's smallest flowering plants, a lightning-fast carnivorous plant, a descendent of the oldest flowers on Earth, a plant that photosynthesizes under ice, and more. Scientific names using binomial nomenclature are used in addition to common names - while a plant can have many common names, the scientific name helps us make sure we're talking about the same species.



EMERGENT PLANTS

- plants that are rooted in the shoreline but have stems, branches, and leaves above water



Broadleaf Cattail
Typha latifolia



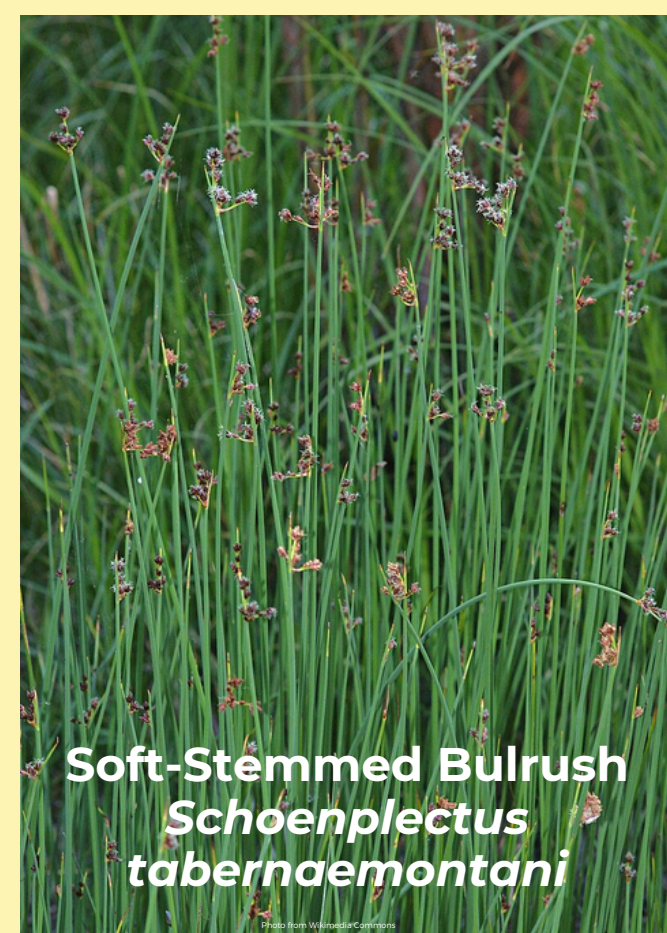
Common Arrowhead
Sagittaria latifolia



Northern Wild Rice
Zizania palustris



Pickerelweed
Pontederia cordata



Soft-Stemmed Bulrush
Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani



FLOATING PLANTS

- plants characterized by the presence of leaves that float on the water's surface



Common Duckweed
Lemna minor



Floating Pondweed
Potamogeton natans



Little Floating-Heart
Nymphoides cordata



Narrow-leaf Bur-reed
Sparagnum fluctuans



Yellow Pond Lily
Nuphar variegata

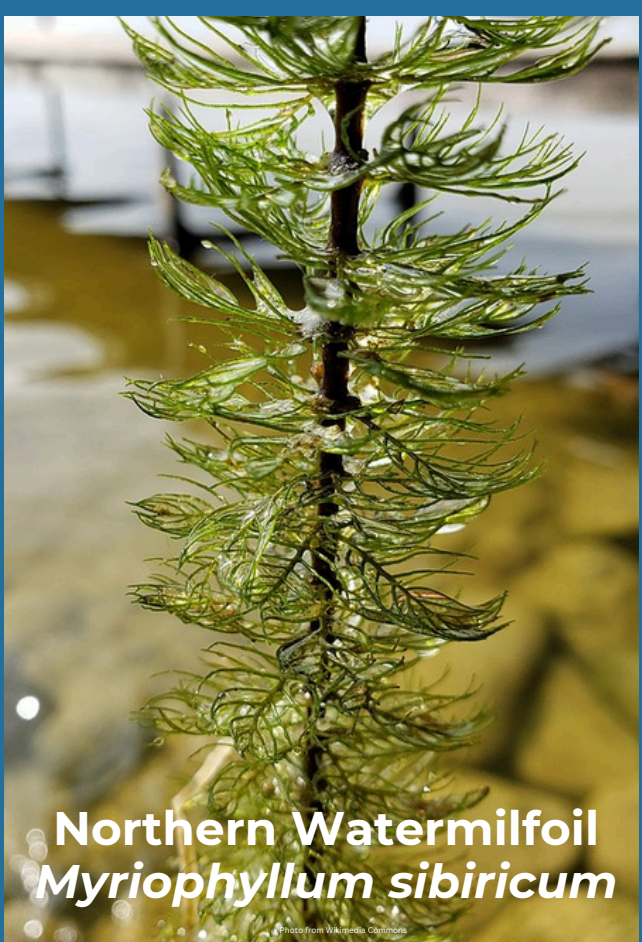


SUBMERSED PLANTS

- plants that are mostly or entirely underwater.



Common Waterweed
Elodea canadensis



Northern Watermilfoil
Myriophyllum sibiricum



Big-leaved Pondweed
Potamogeton amplifolius



Common Bladderwort
Utricularia vulgaris



American Eelgrass
Vallisneria americana



Scan for more on Lake Champlain's native aquatic plants!
Access LCC's suite of fact sheets, ID cards, a roving art show celebrating native aquatic plants, resources for educators, & more.



The Lake Champlain Committee (LCC) is a watershed-based nonprofit that uses science-based advocacy, education, and collaborative action to protect and restore water quality, safeguard natural habitats and ensure recreational access in the Lake Champlain Basin.



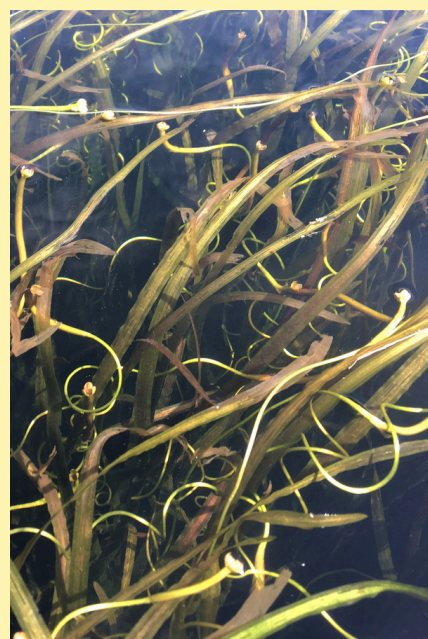
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American Eelgrass *Vallisneria americana*



Eelgrass has ribbon-like leaves and grows in shallow waters. It frequently washes ashore in clumps. It makes for a popular snack among wildlife and provides habitat for young fish. Beds of eelgrass help stabilize sediment and create a setting for the detrital food webs of Lake Champlain's aquatic ecology.



Big-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton amplifolius*



One of many *Potamogeton* (pondweed) species in Lake Champlain, big-leaved pondweed has, as its name suggests, big leaves: its submersed leaves are larger and have more veins than any other pondweed species. It often grows in deeper water up to several meters deep. It has been used successfully in aquatic ecosystem restoration, growing tenfold in the first season.



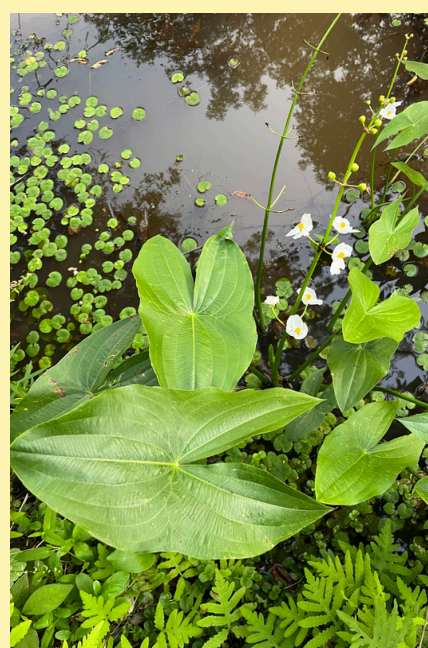
Broadleaf Cattail *Typha latifolia*



Broadleaf cattail is found in wet soils and shallow water. With an enormous capacity for growth, it can aggressively colonize areas of human disturbance. Known as "the supermarket of the swamp," all parts of the plant have been widely used by Indigenous people for medicine, food and crafts. It also provides crucial habitat for wetland species.



Common Arrowhead *Sagittaria latifolia*



Common arrowhead is a colony-forming perennial that rises above water level up to three feet. The leaves are distinctly arrowhead shaped (sagittate). It's also called wapato, katniss, and duck potato. The latter name comes from its edible tubers - not for ducks, but for people, and for muskrats and beavers who can dig through the muck to harvest.



Common Bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris*



Common bladderwort is unique among submersed species in Lake Champlain - it's a carnivorous plant and is technically the fastest plant in the world. The tiny bladders on the plant are traps that, when the hair-like triggers around the bladder are set off, suck in water and seal in the aquatic microorganism that set it off - a process that takes about 10 milliseconds.



Common Duckweed *Lemna minor*



Among the smallest of all flowering plants on earth, common duckweed is a free-floating perennial that can form a floating mat of minute foliage on the water surface. It is dispersed around the world and commonly found in calm, nutrient-rich waters. It can be used to remove excess nutrients or toxic metals from water in a process called phytoremediation.



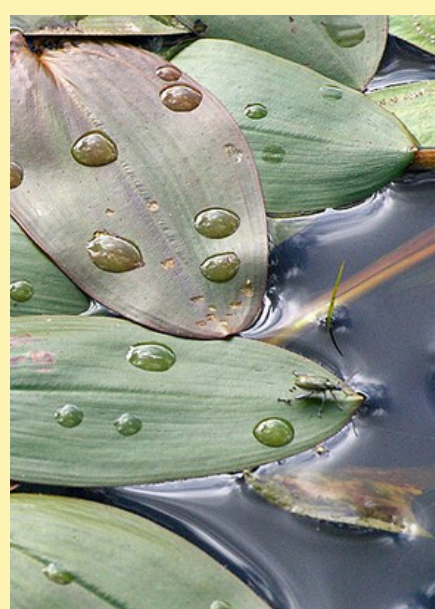
Common Waterweed *Elodea canadensis*



Common waterweed is one of the most common submersed plants in Lake Champlain. It's important food and habitat for a variety of wildlife, particularly in the winter - it is capable of photosynthesizing all year round, even under ice.



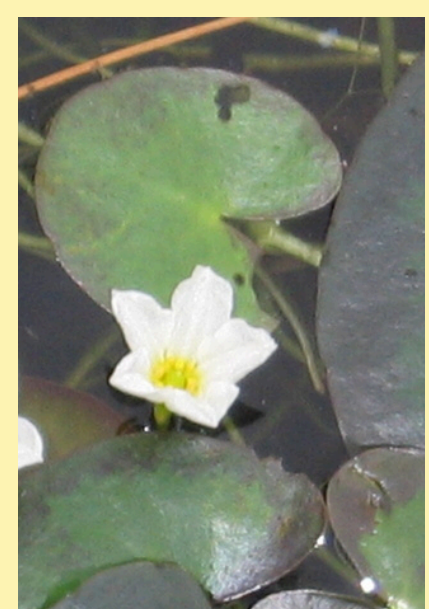
Floating Pondweed *Potamogeton natans*



One of several *Potamogeton* (pondweed) species in Lake Champlain, floating-leaf pondweed is very common in the lake. The shape of the floating leaves depends on the speed of the current, with faster current resulting in more elongated leaves. It provides habitat for a diverse array of micro- and macro-invertebrates.



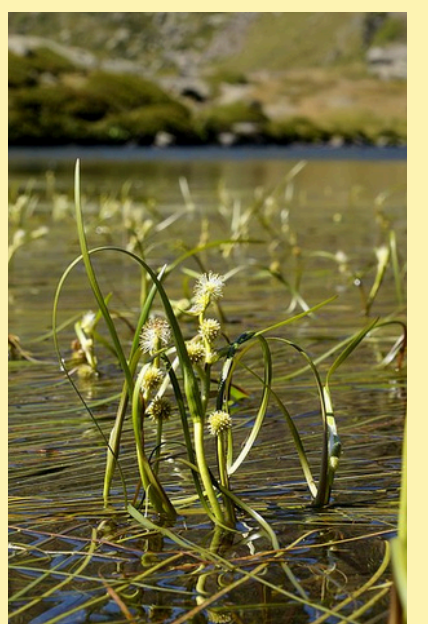
Little Floating-Heart *Nymphoides cordata*



Little floating-heart resembles a tiny pond lily, with heart-shaped (cordate) floating leaves about two inches wide and a dime-sized white flower. It resembles the invasive European frogbit, but the underside of little floating-heart is deep purple. Submersed portions of the plant provide habitat for micro- and macro-invertebrates.



Narrow-leaf Bur-reed *Sparagnum fluctuans*



Narrow-leaved bur-reed is a perennial that produces a floating stem with long, narrow, flattened leaves. It can become abundant, with populations practically covering the surface of the water. Bur-reed tends to prefer low-nutrient water and can be an indicator of those conditions. The plant is important cover for fish such as northern pike.



Northern Watermilfoil *Myriophyllum sibiricum*



Northern watermilfoil can grow over a meter long and is lined with whorls of fanlike leaves divided into narrow, feathery leaflets. It is often confused with the invasive Eurasian watermilfoil. It is a food source for waterfowl and does not colonize areas as aggressively as its invasive lookalike. Count the leaflets: northern watermilfoil has fewer than 12, while the invasive has 12 or more.



Northern Wild Rice *Zizania palustris*



Northern wild rice is a robust annual grass that produces large grains. Wild rice grows in shallow water in small lakes and slow-flowing streams; often, only the flowering head of the plant rises above the water. The grain is eaten by ducks and other aquatic wildlife, and is a culturally significant staple food for Indigenous people throughout North America.



Pickerelweed *Pontederia cordata*



Pickerelweed is a common emergent plant distinguished by its large, waxy leaves and showy purple flowers that point up two to three feet above the water's surface. Its stems and leaves act as a buffer to protect the lakeshore. While there is no direct tie to its namesake fish the pickerel, wildlife of all kinds use its foliage for covered shelter.



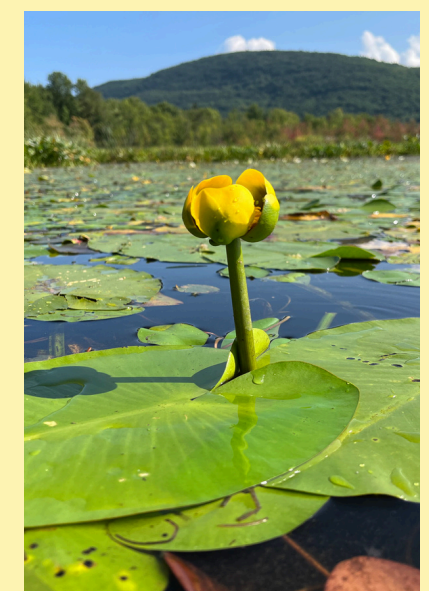
Soft-Stemmed Bulrush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*



Soft-stemmed bulrush has a wide native range that includes the Lake Champlain Basin. It is a rhizomatic, emergent plant that typically forms a slowly-spreading clump of rush-like stems (culms) to four to eight feet tall. Its name hints at how it's distinguished from other bulrush species - when gently squeezed, the spongy stem will easily compress.



Yellow Pond Lily *Nuphar variegata*



Yellow pond lily has alternate, simple leaves, on submerged stems. As a member of the *Nymphaeales* plant order, it is a descendent of the oldest flowering plants on Earth. Its distinct bright yellow flowers, peaking a few inches above the water, smell like fermenting fruit which attracts pollinators.