

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Yellow Flag Iris

*Iris pseudacorus L.*



Photo: Nancy Loewenstein, Auburn University, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)

### Background:

This showy flower was originally used as an ornamental wetland plant, but was also promoted for erosion control and to remove metals and nutrients from sewage treatment plant effluent.

### Range:

Originally from Europe, western Asia and northern Africa, this plant is now reported throughout the east, Midwest, south and west coast of the U.S.



[www.dcnr.state.pa.us](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us)

### Description:

An herbaceous perennial that grows to a height of three to four feet. The leaves grow to a length of one to three feet and are green with a grayish-blue tint. Flowers are usually yellow, although they may also be cream-colored.

### Habitat:

This plant can survive a wide range of conditions, from fresh to brackish water and even low oxygen habitats. Wetlands, stream banks, ponds and ditches are places you may see this plant. Yellow iris tolerates high soil acidity and needs high levels of nitrogen for optimum growth.



Map courtesy of <http://plants.usda.gov>

### Biology and Spread:

Each fruit capsule contains roughly 120 seeds (*top image*) that are buoyant and can float long distances in water. The plant can also spread vegetatively through pieces of its rhizome/roots (*bottom image*).



Photo: Steve Hurst, USDA, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)



Photo: Leslie Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)

### Ecological Threat:

Widely planted as a pond ornamental in the past, this plant has escaped cultivation. It can form dense colonies in fresh or brackish water, altering habitat and displacing native plant and animal species. All parts of the plant are poisonous.



Photo: Jessica Sprajcar, DCNR

## How to Control this Species:

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### Manual

Be careful when removing by hand: resin from the leaves and roots of this plant can cause skin irritation.

At a minimum, remove seed pods and flowers to help slow this plant's spread.

Small infestations can be dug up but the entire rhizome system must be removed or the plants will return. Limit soil disturbance as much as possible.

### Chemical

For most large-scale infestations, some form of herbicide will be needed. Several readily available herbicides can be effectively used to treat this plant, including a glyphosate that is labeled for use in wetland habitats.

Because of the extensive root system, multiple applications of herbicide over multiple years will probably be needed for eradication.

Always follow all of the herbicide label's instructions and state requirements.

## Native Alternatives:

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These plants are native to the northeast and don't have invasive tendencies.

**Blue flag iris,**  
*Iris versicolor*



Photo: Judy Slater,  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)



**Swamp rose mallow,**  
*Hibiscus moscheutos*

Photo: North Carolina DOT

## References:

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USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Staff: *Weed of the Week*:  
[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive\\_plants](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants)

Oregon State University Extension Service:  
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/node/1008>

**Blue vervain,**  
*Verbena hastata*



Photo: Jessica Sprajcar,  
DCNR



Photo: Nancy Loewenstein,  
Auburn University, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)

## For More Information:

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DCNR Invasive Species Site: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

*Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas*, National Park Service:  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

*Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide*, U.S. Forest Service:  
[http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf)