ID CARD

Cape Pondweed

(*Aponogeton distachyos*)

Family name: Aponogetonaceae (Aponogeton family)

Common name/s: Cape Pondweed, Water Hawthorn, Cape Water Lily

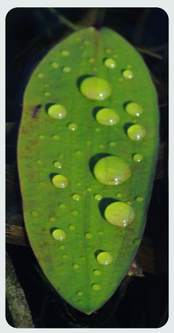
Cape Pondweed (*Aponogeton distachyos*) is an aquatic perennial known for its attractive, floating flowers and use in ornamental ponds. In Ireland, it is a naturalised species with the potential to become invasive in slow-moving water bodies and ponds.

The plant reproduces through seeds and vegetative propagation, making management necessary to prevent its spread. Control methods include mechanical removal, water level management, and careful disposal to avoid unintentional spread. Cape Pondweed poses a risk to native aquatic ecosystems if it escapes cultivation.

Description - Cape Pondweed is noted for its floating, fragrant flowers and oblong leaves. While popular in cultivation, it can establish in the wild in temperate regions and may become invasive in some water bodies.

Key characteristics include:

Size: The leaves and flowers typically float on the water surface, with submerged stems extending up to 1 metre in length.

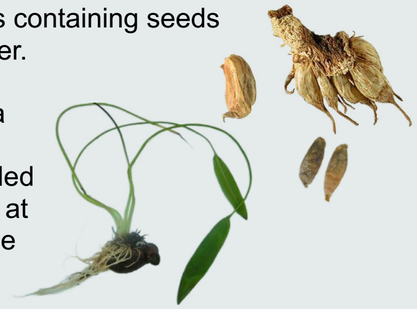


Leaves: The leaves are oblong to lance-shaped, measuring 8-25 cm in length and 3-7 cm in width. They are dark green, with a waxy texture and smooth or slightly wavy edges.

Flowers: Produces fragrant, white to pinkish flowers with distinctive dark anthers. The flowers appear on forked spikes that float on the water's surface and bloom from spring to autumn, depending on the climate. The flowering spikes consist of two branches (distachyos), hence the species name.

Fruit: Forms small, oval fruits containing seeds that can be dispersed by water.

Root: The plant grows from a tuberous root system embedded in the substrate at the bottom of the water body.



Habitat - Cape Pondweed is native to the Western Cape of South Africa, where it grows in seasonally flooded wetlands and still or slow-moving freshwater bodies. In cultivation and introduced regions, it prefers:

- Ponds, Lakes, and Slow-Moving Rivers: Thrives in still or slow-flowing water, where it can form dense mats on the surface.

- Water Gardens and Artificial Ponds: Widely used as an ornamental aquatic plant due to its attractive flowers and ability to grow in shallow water.

The plant grows well in freshwater with a depth of 30 cm to 1 metre, and it prefers full sun to partial shade. It can tolerate a range of water conditions, including soft to moderately hard water.

Status in Ireland - In Ireland, Cape Pondweed is considered a naturalised species in some areas, particularly in garden ponds, ornamental lakes, and slow-moving water bodies. While not yet classified as a highly invasive species, it has the potential to spread and establish in the wild, where it can displace native aquatic vegetation. Care should be taken to prevent its escape from cultivation.

Reproduction and Spread - Cape Pondweed reproduces through both seed production and vegetative growth:

- Seed Dispersal: The seeds can be dispersed by water currents, allowing the plant to spread in connected water bodies.

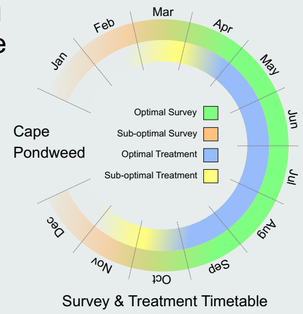
- Vegetative Propagation: The plant can also spread through its tuberous roots, which can give rise to new growth, particularly if fragments are moved to new locations.

Management and Control - Managing Cape Pondweed requires efforts to prevent its spread and control established populations:

- Mechanical Control: Hand-pulling or cutting the plants can help reduce biomass, but it is important to remove the tubers to prevent regrowth. Regular maintenance may be needed in ponds to control the spread.

- Water Level Management: Draining ponds or reducing water levels in winter can help control the plant by exposing it to freezing conditions, which may damage the tubers.

- Preventative Measures: Avoid planting Cape Pondweed in natural water bodies, and ensure proper disposal of plant material to prevent accidental spread.



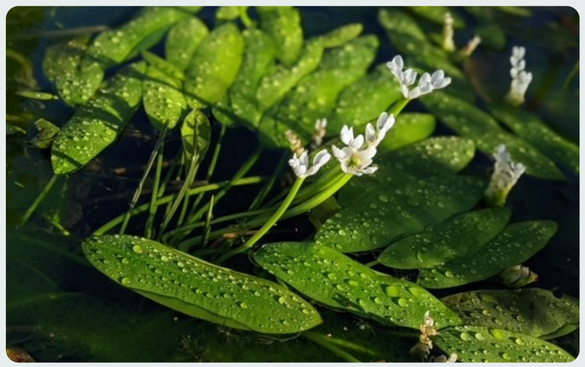
Survey & Treatment Timetable

Ecological Impact - Cape Pondweed can have several ecological impacts if it becomes established outside cultivation:

- Competition with Native Species: Can form dense mats that outcompete native aquatic plants, potentially reducing biodiversity.

- Alteration of Aquatic Habitats: The dense growth can change the structure of aquatic habitats, affecting light penetration and water flow, which can impact fish and invertebrate populations.

- Potential for Spread: If not managed, it can escape from garden ponds and establish in natural water bodies, leading to long-term ecological changes.



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