

# Nymphaea alba

## COMMON NAMES

common water lily

## BIOSTATUS

Exotic

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Floating leaved aquatic plant with 'lily' shaped leaves and usually with white flowers (can be pale pink and hybrids may be red, yellow or bluish), that can develop dense stands in still and slow flowing waters.

## FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout horizontal rhizome up to 60 mm across. Leaves are almost round to elliptical in shape, with a deep sinus. Leaves are up to 25 cm across, green or pink on the lower surface, with a distinct main vein. Flowers are either white or pale pink (hybrids can have red, yellow, or blue flowers) and are up to 20 cm across.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Mexican water lily (*Nymphaea mexicana*), marshwort (*Nymphoides geminata*), and fringed water lily (*Nymphoides peltata*). Mexican water lily has an erect rhizome distinguishing it from common water lily, which has a horizontal rhizome. Mexican water lily also often has brown blotches on the upper surface of leaves, which don't occur on the leaves of common water lily. Marshwort and fringed water lily have thin stolons which loop across the sediment surface or lie just beneath the water surface, whereas common water lily has thick rhizomes.

## DISTRIBUTION

Widely naturalised, first record 1950, but widely cultivated and planted before that time.

## HABITAT

Still and slow flowing water bodies, usually found growing in ornamental pools. It is normally found growing up to 2 m depth in muddy substrates.

## GENUS

*Nymphaea*

## FAMILY

Nymphaeaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Nymphaea alba* L.

## FLOWERING

November, December, January, February, March



Flower of *Nymphaea alba*. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



*Nymphaea alba*. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## YEAR NATURALISED

1950

## ORIGIN

Native to Northern temperate regions

## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental pond plant

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Rhizome extension and fragmentation, rarely by seed. Deliberate plantings

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

## ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

**This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC.** 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication.

<http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species>.

## ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA). Habitat information from Coffey and Clayton (1988).

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/nymphaea-alba/>

## PDF DATE

07 June 2026