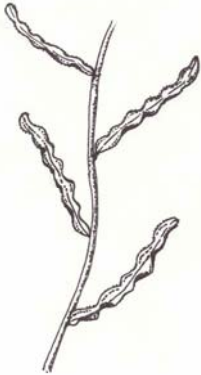
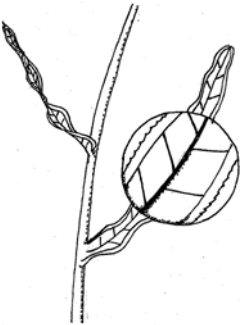


Identification of Curly-leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*)

Mary Blickenderfer, University of Minnesota Extension



Alternate leaf pattern



Branching leaf veins of curly-leaf pondweed



Parallel leaf veins of native pondweeds

Curly-leaf pondweed is native to Europe, Africa, Australia, and Asia. It was apparently introduced to the U. S. in the 1800s. It is widely sold as an aquarium plant.

Identification

Curly-leaf pondweed can be distinguished from other aquatic plant species using the following two attributes:

- 1) its leaves attach to the stem in an *alternate pattern* (typical of pondweeds), AND
- 2) the leaves have secondary veins branching from a midvein. Native pondweeds have parallel leaf veins. Hold leaf up to light source and compare with illustrations.

Habitat

Curly-leaf pondweed is a rooted, submersed aquatic plant, growing in water depths of 1 to 10 feet (0.3 to 3 m.) or more. Tolerant of low light, curly-leaf pondweed can grow in turbid water, during algae blooms or under ice. The strong rhizomes anchoring the plants into sediment allow curly-leaf pondweed to grow in areas with strong wave action or streams with moderate velocity.

Life cycle

Curly-leaf pondweed has a unique life cycle that gives it competitive advantage over many native aquatic plants. In the autumn, curly-leaf pondweed sprouts from turions (small, dormant stem structures containing buds) lying on the lake bottom. Young plants remain alive under the ice during the winter. Their rapid, early spring growth forms dense mats just below the water surface, shading out slower-growing native plants.

In May, flower spikes emerge above the water surface. By June, mature fruits drop to the sediment. Seeds in these fruits have very low germination rates.

Prior to dying back in late-June, curly-leaf pondweed produces many turions in leaf axils along its stem. When the parent plant dies, these turions disperse, sink to the lake bottom, and lie dormant during the summer when other aquatic plants are actively growing.

Disturbance events during the growing season can break the stem into fragments that are easily dispersed and readily root to produce new plants.