

Controlling the Spread of Yellow Flag Iris

(Lise Dietrich)

The Yellow Flag Iris is pretty but it is on Maine's list of Invasive Plants. It can choke out other plants and spread across shallow areas, potentially interfering with normal water flow. After first seeing them on Lake Penneesseewassee in 2016, LAON became a leader in developing a mitigation strategy. We work closely with the State of Maine Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry to protect Norway's lakes and to avoid becoming a source of seeds that spread to other waterways. Only the yellow variety is invasive and subject to control; the purple iris is not invasive.

Our first step every year is to survey the shoreline during the bloom period to note any new plants. If a suspected yellow iris is not in bloom, we record its location to check the next year. LAON volunteers "deadhead" the flowers to prevent them from going to seed and spreading to new areas. Deadheaded blossoms are bagged and trashed but not composted. Composted seeds could take root.

While deadheading keeps plants from invading new areas, it does not prevent the roots (called rhizomes) from growing and spreading. Where possible, volunteers cut back foliage throughout the summer in an effort to starve the roots of their energy source. Since the plants are difficult to identify once the blooms have passed, the plants are marked with orange driveway marker stakes. We then cut the plants back repeatedly in July through September. (If you see any stakes, please don't remove them!)

Some plants are easy to reach and can be cut with a string trimmer. Many other stands of Yellow Iris were established in hard-to-access areas such as bogs, or behind thick stands of mulberry or cat o' nine tails so volunteers also carry garden shears or a knife on their treks. Volunteers must also watch for poison ivy, especially along the Lake Road where there are several stands of Yellow Iris. The largest infestation is on Lake Penneesseewassee, in the boggy area on the northernmost shore.

If you see a Yellow Iris that is not marked, please do not dig it up! Even a tiny root fragment can float to a new location and take root. Instead, please send an email to norwaylaon@gmail.com and let us know where you found the plant. GPS coordinates and photos of the area are very helpful. We'll add the location to our inventory and determine the best approach to prevent its spread.

Our Team is always looking for new volunteers in our ongoing mitigation project. Or you might adopt a specific area to monitor. While you're enjoying being out on the lake, you could also look for that gleam of yellow.

The largest infestation of Yellow Iris on Lake Pennesseewassee, in the boggy area on the northern-most shore.



Some stands of Yellow Iris, like this one along the Lake Road, can be tricky to find. Notice the spiked plants among the grass.



Yellow Iris at the south end of Lake Penn



This stand of Yellow Iris was particularly difficult to get to. The plants in the foreground are cat o' nine tails which do not present a problem for our lakes



If the flowers are allowed to go to seed, seed pods form. The seed pods below were collected from multiple sites at the south end of Lake Pennesseewassee in July 2019.

