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Parrotfeather

By Kristen Scagnelli

Give them an inch and they'll take an acre. I'm talking about a plant called *Myriophyllum aquaticum* or parrotfeather, if you prefer. This plant is one of the more aggressive invasive plants on the whole wild east coast.

What could be so frightening about such a bright green and feathery plant? Don't let parrotfeather's innocent appearance fool you: it's a regular Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde! This plant can single-handedly clog an entire river, stream, stream bank, pond, or even a lake. It also changes the chemical characteristics of the water and chokes out the algae. By out competing native plants the ecology is rendered out of balance.

Many of the ecological problems caused by this plant have a marked effect on people. It blocks off areas so that kayaking becomes nearly impossible. By out competing native plants that fish rely upon, recreation and commercial fishing are negatively impacted. It also makes swimming more difficult, and serves as a breeding ground for disease-carrying mosquitos.

In September of 2009, a 2-mile infestation of this plant was discovered on the Menantico Creek in Vineland, NJ. So where did it come from, and how do we get rid of it? Parrotfeather was originally introduced to the U.S. as an outdoor pond and aquarium plant. Unfortunately, it spreads by fragmentation, which means that if part of the plant breaks off, it just puts its roots down somewhere else. This particular infestation appears to have started out in someone's outdoor pond and then to have been carried by a bird to the nearby stream. Currently joint efforts between Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River & Its Tributaries, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the City of Vineland, and the Vineland Environmental Commission are underway to eradicate this plant.

The best way to stop the spreading of parrotfeather is just to stop planting it. Although it is a beautiful plant, just-as-beautiful native alternatives are readily available. One thing is for sure, the beautiful appearance of this plant is greatly outweighed by its ugly nature.