

Yellowflag Iris
Iris pseudacorus

Currently in Montana, noxious weeds infest about 7.6 million acres (Montana's Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2008). Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction, 32 non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state noxious weed list.

Yellowflag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) is a Priority 2A listed noxious weed in the state of Montana. Priority 2A species are noxious weeds that are common in isolated areas within the state of Montana. Management for these species includes eradication or containment in areas where the population is less abundant. Management for these species is prioritized by local weed districts. Species listed as Priority 2A noxious weeds are: tansy ragwort, meadow hawkweed complex, orange hawkweed, tall buttercup, perennial pepperweed, yellowflag iris, blueweed, and hoary alyssum.

Yellowflag iris is native to Europe and occurs in North Africa and the Mediterranean region as well. This riparian habitat dweller was introduced into the United States for use in ornamental water gardens and waterways. Yellowflag iris has also been used in mining reclamation areas and sewage treatment plants because of its ability to remove heavy metals from the water through its roots. Yellowflag iris escaped into the wild and this non-native continues to spread across the United States infesting ponds, wetlands, and marshes. Yellowflag iris is detrimental because it out competes native vegetation, displacing those species and negatively impacting habitat for wildlife, ducks, geese, reptiles, and mammals such as muskrats. Not only does yellowflag iris disrupt plant and animal habitats, since this plant colonizes in large dense clumps, it has the potential to occlude irrigation systems and interferes with water movement pathways.

Yellowflag iris is a very showy species; it can grow to heights of up to 4 feet tall. Leaves are long, flattened and sword-like. The leaves of yellowflag iris look quite similar to those of cattails. To tell the difference, you can look at the base of the plant. Yellowflag iris leaves have a 'fan-like' appearance as the leaves come out of the ground, they 'fan' out. Flowers are large and bright yellow and are typical in shape of other iris species. Yellowflag iris is a large plant that has the capability of producing lateral underground roots that reach up to 20 feet in length. This shoreline invader is difficult to control because it can reproduce both through seeds and through fragmentation of the underground lateral roots; these pieces can set roots and establish new plants. This plant produces fruits that are brown in color, oblong and capsule like in shape and contain small dark brown disk-like seeds. Seeds are transported via wind and water; once the fruit is opened, the seeds are so small that the wind can blow them out of the opened fruit and into the water where the water carries the seed downstream.

It is important to note that yellowflag iris is still being sold on the internet through gardening websites. Do not purchase this plant; it's only known occurrences in Montana are in the north western side of the state. If you think you have found an infestation of yellowflag iris be sure to alert your local county weed district coordinator so that they can confirm the presence of this noxious weed and a proper treatment program can begin.

Yellowflag iris is best controlled with herbicides. Since yellowflag iris tends to inhabit wet, marshy riparian areas, consult with your local county weed district on what is the best option of treatment and what types of herbicides are safe to use around water. Please take a few moments to learn about noxious weeds, if noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-3144.