



Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

Catalog of Species Search Results



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Iris pseudacorus

(Yellow iris
Yellow flag)

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COMMON NAME

Yellow iris
Yellow flag

FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

Iris pseudacorus L.

FAMILY NAME COMMON

Iris family

FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Iridaceae

IMAGES



Flowers-bright
yellow form



Incursion



Flower - pale
yellow form



Incursion



Fruits

Inside of cut
rhizome

Incursion



Incursion



Habit

NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

Synonyms: None

DESCRIPTION

Botanical Glossary

Iris pseudacorus is a herbaceous perennial that can grow up to 0.9-1.2 m (3-4 ft.) in height. The broad, sword-shaped leaves are stiff, erect and glaucous. They measure between 0.5-1 m (1.6-3.3 ft.) long and 1-3 cm (0.4-1.2 in.) wide. The rhizomes are pink-fleshed and 1-4 cm (0.4-1.6 in.) in diameter.

The showy flowers of *Iris pseudacorus* bloom from April to June. Most often they are yellow, but their color can also range from nearly white to cream. The flowers are 7-9 cm (2.75-3.5 in.) wide. They are borne on erect peduncles and there are several flowers on each stem. There are six perianth segments that are clawed. Three of these are upward-pointing petals and three are downward spreading sepals. These sepals often have purple, brown or red veins on their yellow surface. The fruits are 4-8 cm (1.6-2.7 in.) long capsules. These capsules are 6-angled and cylindric-prismatic to ellipsoid in shape. The average capsule contains around 120 seeds that start out white, then harden and turn brown as the season goes on.

Page References Bailey 273, Crow & Hellquist 323, Fernald 462, Gleason & Cronquist 484, Holmgren 810, Magee & Ahles 357, Newcomb 120, Peterson & McKenny 100, Seymour 191. See reference section below for full citations.

SIMILAR SPECIES

Iris versicolor L. (Northern blue flag) [Picture of *I. versicolor*](#)
Typha spp. (cattails) [Picture of *Typha* spp.](#)

When *Iris pseudacorus* is in bloom, its yellow flower distinguishes it from native irises. *Iris versicolor* has a purple/blue flower and its fruits are 3-angled prismatic-cylindric. While the leaves of *Typha*

spp. are similar, if either plant is in flower they are easily told apart.

REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

Iris pseudacorus's primary agent of dispersal is water. However, the rhizomes are often planted by gardeners, enabling its further spread into the environment.

DISTRIBUTION

Iris pseudacorus is native to all the countries of Europe except Iceland; it is also native to the Caucasus Mountains, Western Asia and North Africa. In North America, it has been reported in Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia. It is present in the majority of the United States, with the exception of a handful of western and mid-western states. *Iris pseudacorus* has been reported from all New England States.

HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Iris pseudacorus was most likely introduced via garden plantings around the middle 1800's. After naturalization, it spread throughout New England. This plant was also used for erosion control and in sewage treatment cells. A very early record of escaped *Iris pseudacorus* comes from the Hudson River basin in 1868, near Poughkeepsie. An early New England record is from Concord, Massachusetts in 1884.

HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Floodplain Forest
Lake or Pond
River or Stream
Yard or Garden

Iris pseudacorus can be found along the edges of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams and immersed in water up to 25 cm (10 in.) deep. It grows well in freshwater wetlands and can tolerate high acidity. In its native habitat, *Iris pseudacorus* can tolerate living in the upper zones of salt marshes, where it may be surrounded by saline water. The plant also tends not to favor calcareous substrates, though there are exceptions to this, such as along the Housatonic River of Connecticut.

THREATS

Iris pseudacorus forms large clonal populations that displace native species. The rhizomes of this plant are able to survive rather heavy droughts. Both the rhizomes and seeds of this plant can be transported downstream, allowing for further spread of the plant. The seeds of *Iris pseudacorus* can germinate even after a wetland

area burns. In its native habitat, this plant is not widely grazed because of the glycosides it contains, making it poisonous to grazing animals. No birds are known to disperse the seeds of this plant. *Iris pseudacorus* is still sold and used for water gardens.

Caution should be used when hand-pulling this plant, as it can cause skin irritation.

MANAGEMENT LINKS

[Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida](#)

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: Specific photograph or mounted snippet of the flowers.

Best time for documentation: Early summer.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida](#)
General information including control and photographs

[The PLANTS Database](#)
General information and a map

[The Nature Conservancy](#)
Photographs and link to extensive description and control information

[Integrated Taxonomic Information System](#)
Has general taxonomic information about the species

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DATA RETRIEVAL

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MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

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- One or more states
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