

Aquatic plants provide many lake benefits

Aquatic plants are a natural part of most lake communities and provide many benefits to fish, wildlife and people. In lakes, life depends—directly or indirectly—on the aquatic plants.

They are the primary producers in the aquatic food chain, converting the basic chemical nutrients in the water and soil into plant matter, which becomes food for all life.

Aquatic plants serve many important functions. They include providing food for fish.

More food for fish is produced in areas of aquatic vegetation than in areas where there are no plants. Insect larvae, snails, and freshwater shrimp thrive in plant beds.

Sunfish — Minnesota's most sought after game fish — eat aquatic plants, in addition to aquatic insects and crustaceans.

Plants provide shelter for young fish. Because bass, sunfish, and yellow perch usually nest in areas where vegetation is growing, certain areas of the lakes are protected and posted by the DNR as fish spawning areas during the spring and early summer.

Northern pike use aquatic plants

too, by spawning in marshy and flooded areas in early spring.

Certain aquatic plants, such as rushes and cattails, can absorb and break down polluting chemicals, thus improving lake quality.

Submerged plants produce oxygen while they absorb phosphorus, nitrogen and other nutrients in the water. Algae, which thrive on dissolved nutrients, can explode in biomass (algal bloom) if too many submerged water plants are destroyed.

Many submerged plants produce seeds and tubers (roots) which are eaten by waterfowl. Bulrushes, wild celery, sago pondweed, and wild rice are especially important duck foods.

Submerged plants also provide habitat to many insect species and other invertebrates that are, in turn, important foods for brooding hens and migrating waterfowl.

The visual appeal of a lakeshore often includes aquatic plants which are a natural, critical part of lake community. Plants such as water lilies, arrowhead, and pickerelweed have flowers or leaves that many people enjoy.

As a natural component of lakes,

aquatic plants support the economic value of all lake activities.

Minnesota has a huge tourism industry centered on lakes and the recreation they support. Residents and tourists spend more billions each year to hunt, fish, camp, and watch wildlife on and around the state's lakes.

A healthy aquatic plant population plays a role in maintaining the lakes' economic value.

For additional information on the relationship between aquatic vegetation and water quality contact Randy Anhorn, administrator/limnologist at the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District office, 651-209-9753 or send mail to: randy.anhorn@clflwd.org.

THE INFORMATION WAS TAKEN FROM THE DNR HANDBOOK "A GUIDE TO AQUATIC PLANTS-IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT." THE HANDBOOK PRESENTS STATE REGULATIONS ON CONTROL, PERMITTING, LONG-TERM CONTROL, AND ILLUSTRATIONS IDENTIFYING 25 COMMON AQUATIC PLANTS. THE COLUMN IS A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM THE CLFLWD.

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