


The logo for Saanich, featuring the word "Saanich" in a bold, sans-serif font above a stylized white semi-circle representing a sun or moon.

Yellow flag iris

Iris pseudacorus

Invasive Plant Alert

A photograph showing a dense stand of yellow flag iris plants in a wetland area. The plants have long, green, sword-shaped leaves and numerous bright yellow flowers. The ground is wet and reflective.

One of the biggest threats to natural ecosystems in Saanich is the spread of invasive non-native plants. The District of Saanich appreciates the cooperation of all residents in removing knotweed from private property. For positive identification, please contact:

On Private Land:
Saanich Environmental Services:
250-475-5471 or plansec@saanich.ca.

On Public Lands or Parks:
Saanich Parks:
250-475-5522 or parcs@saanich.ca.

Why is Yellow Flag Iris a problem?

- Yellow flag iris colonizes and spreads in dense stands, out-competing native wetland plants and reducing habitat and resources available for wildlife. Very few native wildlife species can use this plant for food or habitat. Rhizome mats can prevent germination and growth of other plants.
- Alters habitat including width of water courses by compacting soil, trapping sediments and increasing elevation.
- Degrades natural wetland habitats and wet pastures. Plants clog small streams and irrigation systems, and seeds can block pipes.
- Very difficult to eradicate once established. Dispersed by broken rhizomes and by seeds; a small sliver of rhizome can grow into a new plant.
- Seed pods are buoyant and can remain afloat for up to 7 months, allowing it to spread very long distances down watercourses.

What does it look like?

- Yellow flowers have 3 small slender petals facing up and 3 larger ones hanging down; sepals may be streaked with brown to purple veins. May be several flowers on each stem.
- Leaves are 0.5-1.5 m long, slender, fleshy, sword-shaped with a distinctive ridge in the mid-vein. Usually longer in the centre, fanning out in a single plane toward the edges of the plant. The leaves are dark green to blue/green, and may remain green during mild winters.
- Buoyant, flattened brown seeds to 8mm, in rows within large glossy green 3-angled pods (to 8cm long). Pods resemble small bunches of bananas.
- Stout rhizomes, 1-4cm thick, form dense mats up to 30 cm deep.

Could be confused with:

- Yellow bearded iris (*Iris germanica*)
- When not flowering, could be confused with:
- Cattail (*Typha latifolia*): round at the base and taller than yellow flag iris.
- Bur-reed (*Sparganium* spp): leaves are thick, spongy and narrower than iris leaves.

Look for: Large yellow flower (May-July), leaf with distinguishing ridge in centre; fan-shaped plant base; only iris that occurs in wetland environments.

Also known as:

Yellow flag, paleyellow iris and yellow iris.



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Habitat and biology:

- Perennial in the Iridaceae (iris) family, leaves re-grow each spring from over-wintering rhizomes.
- Yellow flag iris spreads by rhizomes and seeds. Up to several hundred flowering plants may be connected rhizomatously. Rhizome fragments can form new plants if they break off and drift to suitable habitat.
- Flowers usually appear May – July.
- Grows in water to 25cm deep, though most commonly in very shallow water or mud.
- Occurs in temperate wetlands and along the margins of lakes, ponds, ditches and slow-moving rivers.
- Tolerates a range of growing conditions including drying, anoxia, high soil acidity and brackish waters.
- Prefers part shade or full sun exposure, and nutrient-rich conditions.

Distribution:

- Native to the UK, Western Asia, North Africa and the Mediterranean, it has become established and spread quickly in wetlands and along roadsides throughout North America.
- Populations have been established across southern BC since 1930, and now occur in Saanich and other areas on Vancouver Island.

What should you do?

Caution: All plant parts are poisonous - wear gloves! Can cause vomiting and diarrhoea and will sicken livestock if ingested. Contact with the resins in the leaves and rhizomes can cause skin irritation.

- **First priority:** Deplete future seed sources by removing all flowers and seed heads.

Small populations:

- Dig up and remove manually.
- Dispose of all plant parts as outlined below.

Large populations:

- Clip seed heads off to prevent further spread. Cut plant materials close to the ground and clean debris away. Expose rhizomes and cut to their full depth in 10-15cm strips using a sharp tool such as a mattock. Remove the strips with the mattock or a crow bar ensuring that you go the full depth of the plant (up to 30 cm deep).
- Dispose of all plant parts as outlined below.
- Address any recently sprouted seedlings in the summer (July).
- Monitor regularly for re-growth, and remove any new plants that appear.

Proper Disposal

- The District of Saanich is in the process of developing options for disposal of invasive species. Please call Environmental Services or check the Saanich website for updates.
 - A current option is to place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled "invasive species" and take to Hartland Landfill.
 - DO NOT COMPOST! Buds and flowers can still form viable seeds after being dug up.

Other resources

Invasive Plant Council of BC
Garry oak Ecosystems
Recovery Team
Coastal Invasive Plant
Committee
King County, WA Noxious
Weed Control Board

Who do you call?

Contact Saanich Environmental Services for positive identification and to learn about yellow flag iris and other invasive species removal efforts in your area.

Phone: 250-475-5471

E-mail: plansec@saanich.ca

Visit the Saanich website www.saanich.ca to learn more

Under the Noxious Weeds Bylaw No. 8080, the District of Saanich requires that all landowners remove from their property any noxious weeds and invasive vegetation that could spread and become a nuisance