

AMAZON FROGBIT

Limnobium laevigatum



Limnobium laevigatum is a floating aquatic plant, commonly referred to as Amazon frogbit, which originates from Central and South America. Amazon frogbit is sold as an easy-to-maintain plant for use in aquariums but is a highly invasive species when allowed to populate waterways. It was initially discovered in Western Australian waterways in 2013 in Liege St. Wetlands (City of Canning) by the Swan River Trust and South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL). Then, in 2014, it was discovered in Bannister Creek (City of Canning) and was recently discovered in Ballanup Drain (City of Armadale) and Yangebup Lake (City of Cockburn). Each infestation has been an isolated incident thought to be introduced through residents inappropriately disposing of their aquarium.

BIOLOGY

Amazon frogbit poses a real threat to Western Australian waterways as it reproduces prolifically through both seed and vegetatively. Each plant can produce multiple seed pods with each pod containing 20–30 seeds that are viable for at least three years and can germinate readily. It is known to form dense mats across waterways with up to 2000–2500 plants per square metre. These dense mats congest drains and waterways, displace native vegetation and greatly impact water quality.

CONTROL METHODS

Prevention and early detection are key to managing Amazon frogbit and, like many weeds, using a number of methods in coordination is the most successful approach.

The first step is to map the infestation and identify its initial source point. It is very important to understand the extent of the infestation because if even one plant is not controlled it has the potential to re-infest and spread very quickly. Assessing the extent will also aid in deciding its control methods. Once its extent is established mesh barriers or booms should be installed to contain the infestation. Barriers will need to consider water flow, taking care not to create obstructions that will impede water and create flooding or erosion. Following that, assess the maturity of the plant by looking for flowers or seed pods at the base of the plant. If flowers and/or seed pods are discovered, SERCUL advises to use mechanical methods such as excavators (where accessible) and hand weeding in a timely fashion in order to prevent seed from being dispersed. If the plant is juvenile and not flowering chemical applications can be considered for initial control. Chemical applications alone will not be sufficient for control and will require hand weeding to follow.

FACTS

Family: Hydrocharitaceae

Genus: *Limnobium* **Species:** *laevigatum*

Common names: Amazon or Smooth Frogbit, South American Spongeplant

Native distribution: Central and South America

Height: 50cm **Width:** 1-8cm



Amazon frogbit (Limnobium laevigatum) is not a declared weed in Western Australia and can be grown in home gardens. Care must be taken to ensure the weed is not dumped or translocated into our waterways where it quickly spreads.

Amazon frogbit biomass needs to be carefully disposed of and equipment thoroughly washed to prevent it accidentally spreading. If Amazon frogbit is found amongst vegetation, the native plants should be trimmed and cut back and any weeds should be removed entirely to enable access for treatment and easy visibility for follow-up treatments. Care should be taken to reduce impact whenever possible.

Follow up is crucial; when infestation levels are reduced regularly revisit the site to thoroughly map and remove any plants. Ongoing mapping will aid in identifying any hot spots, re-infestation points or aid in determining if it is germinating from a seed bed. Weekly visits should be carried out in the early stages of control with monthly visits carried out once the infestation is reasonably controlled (only a few plants being found per visit).

Eradication is a long term goal so visits should continue for several months after Amazon frogbit is no longer detected in the area and through the following warmer months to ensure success.

HOW CAN VOLUNTEERS ASSIST?

Volunteers can play a helpful role in early identification and even prevention of the spread of Amazon frogbit.

If you see a new plant you do not recognise, getting it properly identified before controlling it is important as it is easy to mis-identify plants. Volunteers can also play a role in working with the landowner to actively hand remove the infestation as this can be very costly and time consuming.

For more information contact SERCUL:
P | 9458 5664 W | www.sercul.org.au


South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare