

## FRAGRANT WATER LILY

### WHITE WATER LILY

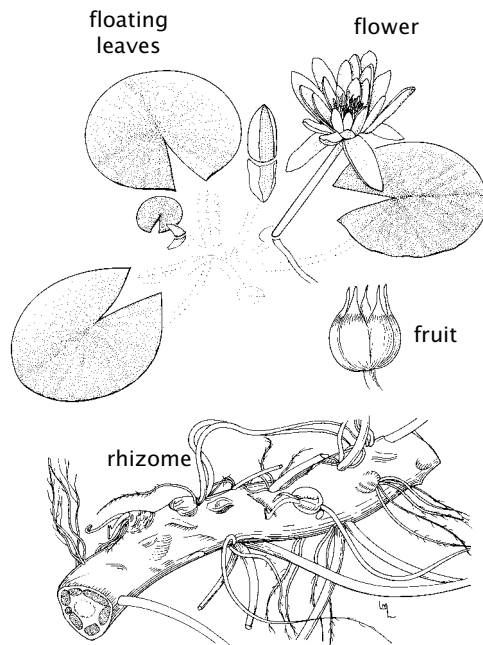
*Nymphaea odorata*

### NATIVE TO MAINE

**Habitat:** Fragrant water lily is found in the floating-leaved plant community. It thrives in quiet water of lakes, ponds and slow moving streams, growing well in a variety of sediment types, to depths up to two meters.

**Description:** Fragrant water lily is a floating-leaved plant with lobed leaves and spectacular white flowers. Long, elastic stems rise toward the water surface from fleshy rhizomes buried in the sediments.

Stems may be faintly striped, and are round in cross-section, containing a bundle of four large air passages. The leaves are fairly round in shape (10 to 30 cm in diameter) with a narrow pie-shaped notch (or sinus) dissecting the circle between two (often overlapping) lobes. The notch between the lobes extends to the stem on the underside of the leaf. The lobes are bluntly to sharply pointed, with the tips gently flaring outward (like a cat's ear). The tops of the leaves are leathery and green; the undersides are reddish purple. The strongly-fragrant flowers are large (7 to 20 cm in diameter), with numerous white petals arranged in a circular cluster around a delicate spray of yellow stamens. The flowers are produced on separate flower stalks arising directly from the rhizome. Native water lilies with pale pink flowers occur in Maine. The dark pink forms, however, are thought to be hybrids with the horticultural *Nymphaea alba*. Though not native to Maine, the dark pink form is not generally considered invasive.



Fragrant water lily (*Nymphaea odorata*)



Fragrant white flower



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**Note:** A subspecies, *Nymphaea odorata* subspecies *tuberosa*, has recently been recognized in Maine. As a result, *Nymphaea odorata* may now be referred to as *Nymphaea odorata* ssp. *odorata*. Whether *N. o. tuberosa* is native or was introduced remains uncertain. The two subspecies do interbreed, and differences in some populations may not be distinct. To differentiate between the two subspecies, closely observe the following four characteristics:

**Petioles** (leaf stems) are more distinctly marked with brownish-purple stripes on *N. o. tuberosa*;

**Seeds** of *N. o. tuberosa* are larger (2.8 to 4.5 mm long as opposed to 1.5 to 2.5 mm long for *N. o. odorata*);

**Small tubers** along the main rhizome of *N. o. tuberosa* have narrow constrictions at their base. This allows them to break off the parent plant very easily. The narrow constriction is lacking on *N. o. odorata*.

**Leaves** of pure *N. o. tuberosa*, are green, but the leaves of *N. o. odorata* can be any color. Intermediates between the two often have light reddish tinge to the underside of the leaf.

**US Range:** Fragrant water lily is native to Maine and New England. Its range includes most of the United States.

**Annual Cycle:** Fragrant water lily is an aquatic perennial that propagates by creeping rhizomes and seeds. Flowering occurs throughout the summer. Flowers open in the morning and close by mid-afternoon. After pollination, flowers submerge and seeds mature inside a fleshy fruit. Rhizomes and seeds sprout new growth as the water begins to warm in the spring.

**Value to the Aquatic Community:** The leaves of fragrant water lily produce shade for aquatic invertebrates and fish. Waterfowl feed upon the seeds. Rhizomes are eaten by deer, muskrat, beaver, moose and porcupine.

**Look Alikes:** May be confused with European frogbit, yellow floating heart, little floating heart, spatterdock and water-shield.



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