

RED PONDWEED

ALPINE PONDWEED

Potamogeton alpinus

NATIVE TO MAINE

Habitat: Red pondweed grows in the submersed plant community. It is found in cold water of lakes and streams.

Description: Red pondweed has two distinct leaf types: submersed leaves and floating leaves. The leaves are oval to oblong, 4 to 25 cm long, tapering to a blunt or slightly acute tip. The leaves are alternately arranged on unbranched stems and attached directly to the stems at the base. Each leaf has 7 to 9 length-wise veins; the prominent veins generally alternate with faint ones. It is common for the submersed leaves to

have a distinctly red tinge, especially when dried. The floating leaves are slightly smaller and delicate, with rounded tips and margins tapering gradually to the petiole. The stems are round in cross-section. The flowers, followed by fruit, occur among the floating leaves and are densely arranged on an emergent spike. The plump fruits have a small stalk protruding from the rim at one end, and a curved beak protruding from the other. The bulging sides are smooth with slight depressions along the middle.



The submersed leaves of *P. alpinus* may be longer with pointed tips (right) or shorter and blunt tips (left)



fruit

US Range: Red pondweed is native to Maine, New England and much of the northern and western United States. Two varieties of red pondweed have been documented in the US (var. *tenuifolius* and *subellipticus*), primarily based upon the submersed leaf shape. However, since both leaf types may be observed in the same population, the distinction is rarely recognized.



Annual Cycle: Red pondweed is an aquatic perennial that propagates from seeds and creeping rhizomes. Plants die-back to the rhizome as winter sets in. New growth sprouts from seeds and rhizomes when the water begins to warm in the spring. Flowers appear by mid-summer, and fruit matures by late summer. Hybrids with another native Maine pondweed, *Potamogeton gramineus*, occur in Maine.

Value in the Aquatic Community: The leaves of *P. alpinus* offer shade, shelter and foraging opportunities for fish. Fruits are a valuable food for waterfowl.

Look Alikes: May be confused with other species of the *Potamogeton* genus including curly-leaf pondweed. Red pondweed is most often confused with variable pondweed (*Potamogeton gramineus*), but *P. gramineus* has branching stems and finely serrated margins under magnification.



Two specimens of *P. alpinus* showing the reddish submersed leaves and the greener floating leaves