

Frog's-bit

Limnobium spongia

American Frog's Bit is a native floating aquatic plant that grows in the shallow water of ponds, lakes and ditches. When water levels are low enough, it will root in the mud at the bottom.

It's family name *Limnobium* comes from the Greek *limnibios*, which means "living in pools."

American Frog's Bit is member of the Tapegrass family and a native, aquatic perennial that can be found from Lake Ontario in the north to the south-eastern states on the Gulf of Mexico. It is especially common in the Gulf states where it prefers partial shade to full sun.

Its leaves are often confused with Water Hyacinth, but the blooms are quite different.

Only one species of *Limnobium* exists in Florida. Two other plants are also known as Frog's Bit: European Frog's Bit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) and Amazon Frog's Bit (another *Limnobium* species).

The European Frog's Bit is listed as an invasive plant by both Canada and Minnesota. One way to tell the difference is by the flowers. The European Frog's Bit's flowers have three white petals and are cup shaped, verses the American Frog's Bit which has the spiky, pointed flowers.

Frog's Bit is a favorite floating aquatic plant in water gardens and aquarium settings. Unfortunately, the European Frog's Bit is often mistakenly sold in garden shops as the native species, which helps spread the exotic plant.

Frog's Bit flowers are monoecious, meaning the male and female functions are on the same plant.

Limnobium spongia blooms from summer to fall. The flowers are relatively small and grow at the water's surface. They are water pollinated, shedding their pollen into the water, which disperses it to the stigmatic surfaces of other flowers.

Following pollination, the peduncle becomes recurved, forcing the developing fruit below the water surface.

The seeds are shed above water, but germinate submerged and the seedlings float to the surface where they grow rapidly. They then spread using runners just under the water's surface.

The adult plant produces glossy, green floating leaves that are very thick and leathery. They are either rounded, or in younger plants, somewhat heart-shaped with rounded lobes.

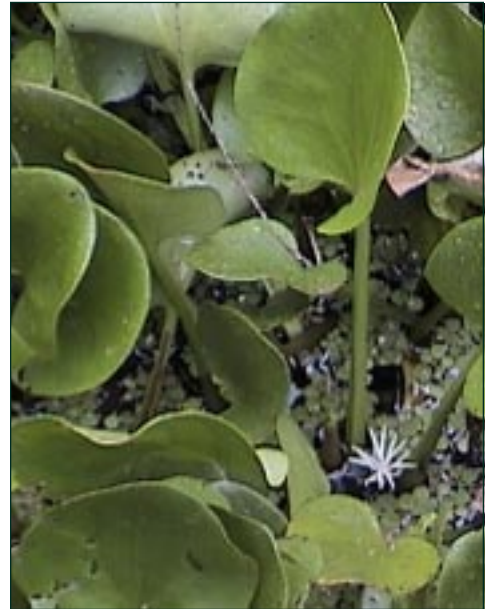
Leaves have a spongy underside that is tinged with reddish-purple. The trailing roots also have the purplish tint. Younger leaves tend to be bright and shiny above and reddish underneath. Undersides of young leaves have a central disk of red spongy cells. The leaf stalks have ridges on either side and are firm.

This floating plant spreads by offshoots and multiplies quickly. If conditions get too crowded, the plants may actually hold their leaves up out of the water. If given enough room, they lay flat on the water, forming a rosette shaped floating plant. The Frog's Bit at Corkscrew, *L. spongia*, is the most likely of the species to form the emergent leaves.

Frog's Bit is one of the earliest aquatic plants to return to the lakes after a dry down. At first, it appears to dominate the water's surface, but Water Lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*) will eventually crowd it out.

The plant is a wildlife attractant. It is a favorite food for Red-bellied Turtles. As leaves die, they become food for other water creatures as well as fish food. Frog's Bit also creates a habitat for different micro organisms that are eaten by ducks and amphibians, and its seeds attract different water fowl.

Other common names are American Frogbit, American Frogs Bit, Frog Bite, and American Spongeplant.



Frog's Bit flowers grow at the water's surface with tiny, up-turned petals. When space is at a premium, the leaves become emergent (extend upwards).



When not crowded, Frog's Bit leaves lie flat on the water's surface. Roots extend deep below the surface.



A Red-bellied turtle dines on Frog's Bit at the north lake.