

# Purchasing Aquatic Plants or Fish: Protect the Environment & Obey the Law

**A**quatic invasive species (AIS) are non-native plants and animals that have been introduced into the environment and have adapted to their adopted habitats. Introduction of AIS can have devastating effects on the environment, as AIS may cause changes in the native habitat by competing with or preying on existing organisms. AIS can also have a negative economic impact, as they can be costly to control or manage and environmental changes may cause a decline in recreational or other activities. For example, zebra mussels have caused changes in the Great Lakes ecosystem, eliminating native mussels and causing toxic algae blooms. Great Lakes water users have spent more than \$30 million annually to monitor and control zebra mussels.

Preventing the introduction of new AIS is the best way to protect the Great Lakes, as eradication of invasive species is nearly impossible once populations become established. To prevent the introduction or spread of invasive species, never release aquatic plants or fish species into the environment. In addition to protecting the environment, this will also reduce your risk of violating state laws regarding invasive species.

## Before You Buy

- ✓ Check legality of possession
- ✓ Obtain permit if required
- ✓ Plan for proper disposal
- ✓ Consider native alternatives

## Before You Buy

Before purchasing fish or plants for your aquarium, backyard pond, or water garden, make sure it is legal to purchase or possess your desired species. Under Illinois state law, it is illegal to purchase or possess “injurious species” (common names listed below) without a permit from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Please visit

### Injurious Species under Illinois Law

* walking catfish family	Chinese waterspinach or
* mitten crabs	swamp morning-glory
* zebra mussels	yellow flag or tall yellow iris
* snakehead	oxygen weed or
* silver carp	African elodea
* largescale silver carp	Asian marshweed or
* black carp	ambulia
* bighead carp	monochoria
* salmon and trout family (due to disease risk)	arrowleaf or false pickerelweed
gobies	heartshape or
rusty crayfish	false pickerelweed
rudd	parrot feather or
river ruffe	parrot feather watermilfoil
mosquito fern	Eurasian watermilfoil
flowering rush	brittle naiad or
caulerpa or Mediterranean	brittle water nymph
killer algae	yellow floating heart
Brazilian elodea,	duck lettuce
Brazilian waterweed,	curlyleaf pondweed
anacharis or egeria	arrowhead
anchored water hyacinth	giant salvinia
hydrilla or water thyme	exotic bur-reed
European or common	water chestnut
frogbit	Indiana swampweed or
miramar weed	hygro

\* also Injurious Species under the Lacey Act

<http://dnr.state.il.us/ORC/> for the list, which includes scientific names of the species, as it's important to verify that your purchase is legal.

The DNR may issue permits to possess injurious species for zoological, educational, medical or scientific purposes. If you need a permit, contact DNR's Office of Resource Conservation (<http://dnr.state.il.us/ORC/>). Possession of these harmful organisms may also result in violations of federal law under the Lacey Act.



Photograph courtesy of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

To prevent the spread of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS), a deadly fish disease, Illinois has regulations regarding the use and transport of VHS-susceptible species. Live VHS-susceptible species may not be transported from the waters from which they are caught. Further, the use of wild-trapped fish as bait is restricted to the waters where they were captured. Bringing in aquatic life from another Great Lakes state may also require special permits and certifications. For a list of VHS-susceptible species and more information on VHS regulations, visit <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov>.

### After You Buy

It is illegal to release injurious species into waters of Illinois. In fact, it is illegal to release any aquatic life into the waters of Illinois without permission from

the DNR. Violations of these laws are misdemeanors and may result in penalties up to \$1,000. However, aquatic life indigenous to Illinois may be released into waters that are located entirely on your own property. For example, while you should not release a rusty crayfish into your backyard stream, you may be able to release a native fish into a backyard pond that is not connected to another water source. In addition, it is permissible to release aquatic life into waters from which they were taken.

Federal law also prohibits aquatic plants and fish on the federal injurious species list from being imported or transported between states or territories without a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A list of injurious species is available at <http://www.fws.gov/injuriouswildlife/>. If you intend to transport your purchase into another state, check with the DNR to make sure you have the authorization to do so.

### What can you do with an unwanted species?

- Contact the retailer where you purchased the species for return or handling instructions.
- Donate the species to a local aquarium or school.
- Contact a veterinarian to find out about humane disposal methods.

#### For More Information

##### Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Office of Resource Conservation

(217) 785-8772

<http://dnr.state.il.us/ORC/>

##### Aquatic Invaders in the Marketplace,

##### Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant

<http://www.takeaim.org/purchase>

##### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov/>

##### Habitattitude

<http://www.habitattitude.net/>