

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

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are non-native plants and animals that have been introduced into the environment and have adapted to their adopted habitats. The Great Lakes has had the highest rate of invasion of any freshwater ecosystem, with over 180 non-native species now established in the Great Lakes Basin.

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 and federal laws regarding invasive species.

Restrictions on Possession and Transport

Before purchasing fish or plants for your aquarium, backyard pond, or water garden, make sure it is legal to possess your desired species. Under Michigan law it is illegal to possess or transport species designated as “prohibited” or “restricted.” Federal law also prohibits interstate transport and importation of “injurious species” listed under the Lacey Act (below).

Injurious Species under the Lacey Act

Walking catfish family, mitten crabs, zebra mussels, snakehead, silver carp, largescale silver carp, black carp, bighead carp, salmon and trout family (due to disease risk).

Species Prohibited by State Law

African oxygen weed, Brazilian elodea, cylindro, European frogbit, fanwort, giant hogweed, giant salvinia, hydrilla, Japanese knotweed, parrot’s feather, starry stonewort, water chestnut, yellow floating heart, rusty crayfish, bighead carp, bitterling, black carp, Eurasian ruffe, grass carp, ide, Japanese weatherfish, round goby, rudd, silver carp, snakehead, tench, tubenose goby, New Zealand mudsnail.

Species Restricted by State Law (higher penalties)

Curly leaf pondweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, flowering rush, phragmites or common reed, purple loosestrife, quagga mussel, zebra mussel.

Before You Buy

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



Photograph of a bighead carp, courtesy of Elizabeth Sellers.

Under Michigan law, the following instances are not considered “possession”: if the organism is on land or waters owned by you, unless you knowingly introduce the organism, you possess one of these organisms at the location where the organism was obtained, or, if you possess one of these organisms for the purpose of immediately destroying the organism. Possession is also allowed if you intend to present the specimen for identification or similar purposes to an environmental, agricultural, or natural resources agency, a higher education institute, or a certified applicator.

In addition to banning interstate transport and importation of injurious species, the Lacey Act makes it unlawful “to import, export, transport, sell, receive, acquire, or purchase any fish or wildlife or plant taken, possessed, transported, or sold” in violation of state law. This means that importing grass carp (which is prohibited in Michigan but not listed as injurious under the Lacey Act) would constitute both a state and federal violation. For example, if you possess a grass carp in violation of state law which you’ve imported from outside

Michigan and then resell that grass carp to another consumer in Michigan, you would be in violation of both federal and state law. The Lacey Act also prohibits injurious species from being imported or transported between states or territories without a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Need a Permit? Contact These Agencies:

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

for possession of prohibited or restricted fish, mollusks, or crustaceans for education or research purposes; or when importing certain fish or viable eggs, including live fish or viable eggs of salmon, trout, grayling, northern pike, muskellunge, white bass, striped bass, bass, bluegill, crappie, perch, walleye, sturgeon, catfish, cisco, whitefish, Japanese weatherfish, grass carp, ide, rudd, bitterling, and tench.

Michigan Department of Agriculture for prohibited or restricted plants or insects.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for transporting prohibited or restricted species across state lines.

Photograph of three New Zealand Mudsnails, courtesy of Penn State News.



Special Considerations for Bait Fish

To prevent the spread of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS), a deadly fish disease, Michigan has regulations regarding the use, transport, and release of VHS-susceptible species. If purchasing or otherwise obtaining bait fish, please visit <http://www.eregulations.com/michigan/fishing/viral-hemorrhagic-septicemia-virus-regulations/>.

Approved Species for Aquaculture

Michigan has an approved aquatic species list, which informs what species are allowed for aquaculture purposes. If using these species for aquaculture purposes, please see <http://www.ncrac.org/node/383> for more information. Generally, retail ornamental fish facilities and those using privately controlled waters for noncommercial purposes are exempt from this list.

Restricted Species

Possession is restricted under Michigan law.

Prohibited Species

Possession is restricted under Michigan law, violations carry heavy penalties.

Injurious Species

Interstate transport and importing restricted under federal law.

VHS-Susceptible Species

Michigan regulations limit movement of these fish due to disease concerns.

What can you do with an unwanted aquatic 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

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10370_59996---,00.html

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313_8314---,00.html

Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development

<http://www.michigan.gov/mdard>

Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, Organisms in Trade

<http://www.inhs.illinois.edu/resources/iisg/organisms-in-trade>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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

Habitattitude

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