

Where There Is Water, There Are Algae

Thousands of kinds of algae live in every wet environment you can think of. They come in all sizes, from microscopic (like the kind you will be growing) to gigantic (like the 46-m-long [150-ft-long] brown kelp). They also come in a rainbow of colors: green, golden, brown, and red.

Microscopic algae are too small to see with just your eyes. But if you've ever seen a pond with what looks like green water, you've seen algae by the millions. It's actually the algae that turn the water green. But you can see them only when they grow in great numbers.

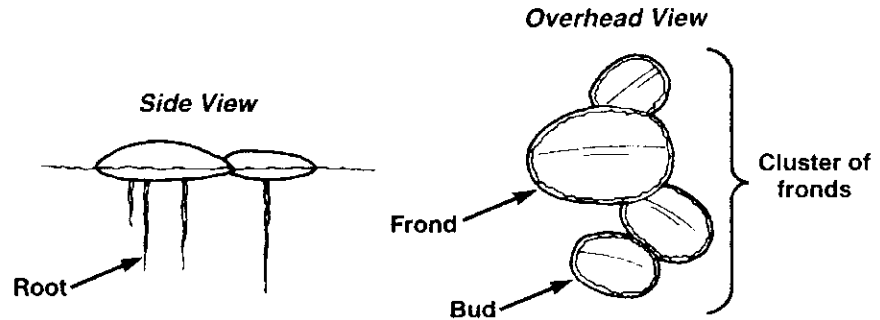
Duckweed: Food for Fowl

Duckweed is a tiny floating plant. It usually grows on the surfaces of ponds, lakes, and slow-moving streams. Duckweed is a favorite food of many waterfowl—ducks, for instance—which is how it got its name. Fish and snails eat duckweed, too.

When growing conditions are good, duckweed plants will multiply very rapidly and form a lush carpet on the top of the water. This thick covering is lovely to look at. But it can cut off so much light from other water plants that it can kill them. That means there is less life-giving oxygen in the water.

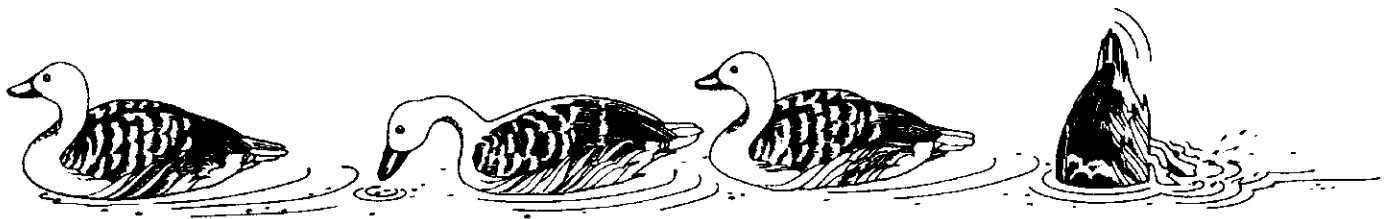
Healthy duckweed is bright yellow-green. It is an unusual plant because it has no leaves or stems. Instead, it consists of one to three leaflike fronds attached at the center. From each frond a single root hangs. Use your hand lens to observe one duckweed plant up close.

DUCKWEED



Make New Fronds

Duckweed rarely flowers, and it almost never does out of nature. So how does duckweed make new plants? It buds to form new fronds. Each frond grows its own root and then becomes an independent plant. In nature we usually can't observe a single frond of duckweed; the fronds tend to stay in groups until four or more plants are produced. (That is why it may have been difficult for you to count out 10 to 15 duckweed plants when setting up your aquarium.)



Why do you think they call it "duckweed"?