Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

FILAMENTOUS ALGAE

FACT SHEET

Filamentous algae are single cell organisms that grow in long strands, or filaments. These filaments can intertwine to form thick mats which float to the surface of lakes and ponds. It can also grow on rocks, aquatic plants, or other submerged objects and flourish in shallow, warm water.

QUICK FACTS

Common Names	Pond scum, water net, moss
Description	Mass of stringy, green algae
Identification	Forms hair-like mats that clump together
Importance	Provides a habitat for microscopic aquatic life
Management	Limit excess nutrients from entering waterbodies

Using a stick to identify filamentous algae (Lake Harriet, 2022)

Blue green algae floating on the water surface (Powderhorn Lake, 2021)

IDENTIFYING FILAMENTOUS ALGAE

Filamentous algae is sometimes confused with blue-green algae, which is a type of cyanobacteria. Both float on the surface of lakes and ponds, but there is an easy way to tell them apart!

When you encounter some mysterious algae, try using a stick to lift it out of the water. Filamentous algae will have a stringy consistency and clump together when lifted. It is not harmful and does not produce toxins. On the other hand, blue-green algae will break apart easily and cloud the water when disturbed. Blue-green algae can be harmful to people and pets, so be careful not to touch it.

FILAMENTOUS ALGAE MANAGEMENT

Algae growth depends on the availability of the element phosphorus. Phosphorus can enter waterbodies through stormwater runoff, when pollutants like grass clippings, leaves, and fertilizer are swept into stormsewers. By sweeping these pollutants away from sidewalks and streets, we can prevent them from ending up in our lakes, rivers, and ponds.

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