



FILAMENTOUS ALGAE FACT SHEET

What are filamentous algae?

Filamentous algae are single algae cells that form long chains or strands. The filaments of algae can intertwine and form thick mats that look like wet wool. Filamentous algae often floats to the surface of lakes and ponds forming large, bubble-filled mats, which can look unsightly. Filamentous algae are usually green, but may be yellow-grayish or brown.

Filamentous algae grow in shallow, clear lakes where sunlight can easily reach the bottom of the lake. The algae will also grow on submerged objects like rocks or aquatic plants.

Quick Facts

Common Names	Pond scum, water net, moss
Location	Ponds, shorelines, shallow lakes
Description	Mass of stringy, green algae
Identification	Hair-like, can form mats
Importance	Provides habitat for many aquatic macroinvertebrates (“water bugs”)
Management	Limit excess nutrients that enter the water; this includes reducing pollution that travels through storm drains

How to identify filamentous algae

Blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, is bacteria that grows in water and looks like algae. Filamentous algae is harmless, stringy or mat-like algae. One way to tell the difference between them is to try the ‘stick test.’ Use a stick to attempt to lift the algae from the water. If the algae lifts from the water and has a stringy consistency, it is likely filamentous algae. If you cannot lift the algae or it clouds the water, it is likely blue-green algae. Avoid all direct contact with blue-green algae, as it can be harmful to people and pets. Remember, when in doubt, best stay out!



*Filamentous algae stick test
(Normandale Lake, 2020)*

Managing filamentous algae

Preventing algae growth is the best way to manage filamentous algae. Algae growth is usually fueled by the nutrient phosphorous. Too much phosphorous can lead to unwanted algae growth. Phosphorous commonly enters lakes and ponds through storm drains. Pollutants like grass clippings, leaves, and fertilizer can release phosphorous into waterbodies. The best way you can help to reduce phosphorous inputs is to sweep these pollutants from your driveway and street, so they cannot travel through storm drains and enter our lakes and creeks.



Blue-green algae in a lake