

# STOP Starry Stonewort

## *Nitellopsis obtusa*



P. Skawinski

The unique star-shaped bulbil of starry stonewort. These structures are used by the plant for reproduction.

### Quick Facts:

- Native to Europe and parts of Asia
- Can spread by hitchhiking on boats and other equipment
- Most easily identified by the presence of star-shaped bulbils, when present

**Do you want to know if starry stonewort or other invasive plants are in your lake?**

**Visit:**

<https://micorps.net/news/eapw-video-2016/>



A. D. Dow

### What is starry stonewort?

Starry stonewort is an aggressive aquatic invasive macroalgae that was accidentally introduced by ballast water to North America in the late 1970s. Unlike algae you find floating in lakes, starry stonewort is large, anchored to the bottom of lakes, and resembles common aquatic plants. Starry stonewort is able to grow in shallow as well as deeper water (up to 30 feet). It was first discovered in Michigan at Lake St. Clair in 1983. Since the mid 2000s starry stonewort has become widespread in inland lakes throughout much of lower Michigan.

### Why is starry stonewort a problem?

Starry stonewort can produce dense “meadows” that cover large areas of a lake basin. In shallow water, these meadows can reach the water’s surface and create large tangled mats. The dense meadows of starry stonewort can hinder recreation and may reduce fish habitat and cause the loss of beneficial native plants.

### How does it spread?

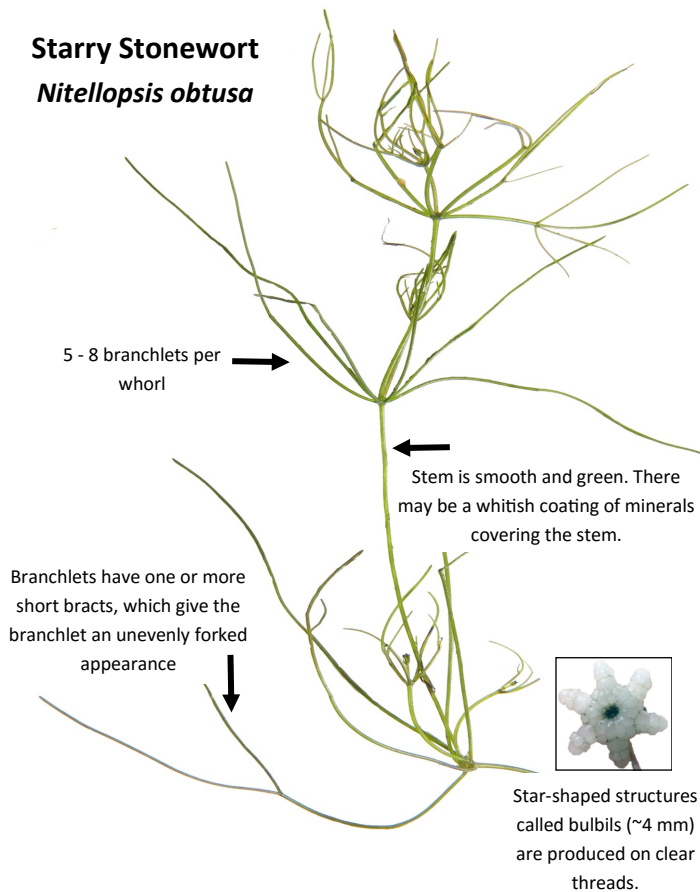
Starry stonewort spreads from fragments of itself or by the star-shaped bulbils. There is no seed dispersal since only male plants have been observed in North America. Boat trailers, anchors, and other equipment are the most likely means for spreading starry stonewort fragments and bulbils from lake to lake.



**STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!**  
[www.ProtectYourWaters.net](http://www.ProtectYourWaters.net)

## Starry Stonewort

*Nitellopsis obtusa*



Adapted from Paul Skawinski and the Wisconsin Citizen Lake Monitoring Network

**If the bulbils are not present** identification can be difficult. To distinguish starry stonewort from its most common native look-alikes, look for:

- **Forking** - Starry stonewort grows bracts that give the branchlets an unevenly forked appearance, whereas, all native *Nitella* sp. branchlets fork evenly.
- **Cells** - Starry stonewort stems are smooth and only feel rough if covered in mineral deposits. Native *Chara* sp., on the other hand, have many long cells running up and down the stem causing them to feel rough.

## What can I do?

Check and remove all plant material from your equipment every time you leave or enter a water body. Monitoring public boat landings may also stop the spread of this species into a lake.

If starry stonewort has already invaded your lake you can mechanically or hand remove small areas. In cases of a larger invasion, herbicide will likely be required. You must be a certified pesticide applicator to apply aquatic herbicide. State permits may be required.

## Having problems identifying starry stonewort? We can help!

Contact us using the information below for instructions on how to send a specimen or photographs.

Erick Elgin  
Michigan State University Extension  
elgineri@msu.edu  
(231) 928-1053

## Identification

Starry stonewort is a grass-like submersed species that is most easily identified by white, 2-5 mm star-shaped bulbils that are produced on clear thread-like structures called rhizoids. These bulbils can be found all over the plant and throughout the year.

**No other plant in the Midwest has these star-shaped bulbils.**



Starry stonewort creates dense mats that easily catch on anchors and other boating gear.

## Starry stonewort native look-alikes:

- Muskgrass (*Chara* sp.)
- Stonewort (*Nitella* sp.)



Please visit us at:  
[www.micorps.net](http://www.micorps.net)

## Partners



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY

