

# Volunteers plant native species at Wyomissing duck pond to keep algae blooms away

A crew of young environmentally minded volunteers joined Wyomissing borough staff and a consultant recently to plant 400 native aquatic plants around a pond on South Parkside Drive known as the duck pond.

Robert Lewis, borough parks and recreation director, said the planting is the culmination of a borough project to reduce the algae bloom in the pond. The borough hired SOLitude Lake Management, a Virginia-based company, to clean and treat the pond to bring it back to its natural state.

Last fall, neighbors of the spring-fed pond [complained the stench was so bad](#) they could not keep windows open at night. They complained to the borough and the state Department of Environmental Resources about mosquitoes and black flies.

A fountain installed in the center of the pond has been only occasionally functioning the past two springs and summers and the water became stagnant and algae blooms took hold. Borough officials said then that heavy rains had resedimented the pond and it needed to be cleaned professionally.

"The algae blooms were really bad in there and we didn't have the manpower," Lewis said.

The pond is in a section of trail east of Wyomissing Boulevard at the [end of a two-mile trail along the Wyomissing Creek](#) that leads to the Reading Public Museum.

Algae blooms, which can be toxic to animals and humans, occur in response to hot sunny conditions in the summer. The algae growth is fed by high levels of nutrients in the water such as phosphorus and nitrogen that may come from fertilizers, manures, septic systems, animal waste or stormwater runoff

This year, there have been no algae blooms, Lewis said.

"The water is nice and clear and we've seen an increase in the turtle population," Lewis said. "The pond doesn't get a lot of use, but it is one of the focal points as people walk through the park."

The borough spent money donated by the Wyomissing High School Environmental Club to buy 400 plant plugs from [Kind Earth Growers](#), Ottsville, Bucks County. The club usually donates the money for an Earth Day celebration but since that was canceled due to COVID-19 about half of the \$1,000 donation was spent on the plants.

The three species of plants will help prevent future algae blooms. Each has a different role around the pond.

Iris versicolor, [known as Blue flag iris](#), is a native wetland perennial. A hardy lakeshore herbaceous perennial is found in shallow waters of pond edges. Surrounded by sword-like leaves, the elegant blue flowers bloom from May to July. It grows about 2 to 3 feet high and is known to attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Pontederia cordata, [known as Pickerelweed](#), is common to fresh water areas, in the shallow water. It flowers from summer to fall in shades of blue-purple. Stalks reach about 2 feet above the water. Pickerelweed provides food and shelter for nectar-feeding insects while fish lurk in the shade of the foliage.

"Pickerelweed is excellent for absorbing nutrients from water and improving

water clarity," according to Kind Earth Growers. "For maximum nutrient removal, the top growth can be cut off and removed (composted) before the plants die back in the fall. This is a common species for bio-purification systems."

The third native plant is called *Sagittaria latifolia*, [known as Duck Potato](#), a perennial that typically grows 2 to 4 feet tall. Known for its arrowhead-shaped leaves, *Sagittaria latifolia* commonly grows submerged in shallow water or out of water on wet muddy banks. Duck Potato is a valuable food source for waterfowl.

Lewis said Wyomissing's park system, like parks all over Pennsylvania, has seen an increase in attendance during the pandemic. Lewis estimated it's been an 80% increase at the borough's 350-acre park system.