



Wild Celery

What is it?

Wild celery is a plant that grows underwater. It is a type of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). Wild celery, *Vallisneria Americana*, is not related to the celery that you eat. It is also called tape grass or freshwater eel grass. Sometimes wild celery is mistaken for eel grass (link to eel grass fact sheet) but eel grass is found where the water is more salty.

What does it look like?

Wild celery has long, flat, ribbon-like leaves that can grow to be over 6 feet long. The leaves grow in clusters from the base of the plant and have finely toothed edges and blunt, rounded tips. A light green stripe runs down the center of the leaves.

Where can you find it?

Wild celery grows in the fresh to slightly brackish waters of the upper Chesapeake Bay and the Bay's tributaries. It prefers soil that is coarse. Wild celery is found in both still and moving water and is more tolerant of murky, nutrient rich waters than most bay grasses. Wild celery is found in many areas of the world.

What does it do?

The base of the wild celery plant provides shelter for bottom dwelling algae and invertebrates. The leaves provide shelter, support and oxygen for animals in the Bay waters. Wild celery also helps reduce erosion. It has finely branching roots,



Drawing from

http://www.chesapeakebay.net/bfq_wild_celery.aspx?menuitem=14364



creeping underground rhizomes and stolons (above ground runners) all of which help hold the soil in place.

Because wild celery uses dissolved nitrogen and phosphorus for growth, it helps control the levels of those nutrients in the water. This helps reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus available for the algae and reduces algal blooms.

What does it eat?

Wild celery and other plants are called primary producers. They survive by producing their own food through a process called photosynthesis. In this process, plants use sunlight, absorbed by a green pigment called chlorophyll, as an energy source. That energy is used to convert carbon dioxide and water into sugars which the plants can use for energy to live, grow, and reproduce. This process releases oxygen and water vapor into the plants' surroundings.

What eats it?

Wild celery is extremely important as a food source for waterfowl in the Bay. Canvasback ducks and other ducks depend on wild celery winter buds and rhizomes for their food in the winter. The importance of wild celery to canvasback ducks is reflected in the scientific name for the species—*Aythya valisineria*, which is taken from the scientific name of wild celery -- *Vallisneria americana*. Other birds, fish, mammals, and aquatic invertebrates also eat wild celery. The entire wild celery plant can be eaten.

Flora Fact

There are separate male and female wild celery plants. The female flower is on a long stalk which reaches the water's surface. The male flowers are clumped at the base of the plant, and then float to the surface of the water where they pollinate the female flowers.