

# INDIGENOUS



## PLANT OF THE MONTH

By Geoff Nichols



### *Nymphoides thunbergiana*, Small Yellow Waterlily, Geelwaterlelie

In a previous article on water lilies, our local blue-flowering species needed a fair amount of pond space for it to thrive. Well, this yellow-flowering water lily "look-alike" will happily grow in small water bodies, and even in a small aquarium, as long as it is in full sun.

This plant is not a true water lily. As its generic name implies, it resembles a lily but it really belongs to another plant family altogether, close to the gentian family. It occurs naturally in ponds and streams throughout the country. It will survive in relatively shallow water, although is best planted at a depth of between 20 - 25cm.

The floating rounded leaves are about 60 - 70mm in diameter and the five-petalled yellow flowers have delicate hairy edges to them. Each flower is about 25 mm in diameter. Flowers are borne on a stalk at the base of each leaf where the floating stem is attached to the leaf blade.

*Nymphoides* can be propagated from seed, or more easily by division from old leaves that have completed flowering and small adventitious roots are beginning to appear. Simply cut the leaf off and lay it on damp soil and weigh it down with a small stone. In a few weeks, during the summer growing period, you'll have a brand new plant to stock the next pond.

These plants all help to add interest to the water surface. The leaves perform a useful function by shading the water so that fish and other pond creatures can shelter from the sun and predators. Small tree and water lily frogs lay their eggs on the underside of the lily leaves as well.

This plant is both a true aquatic and a semi-aquatic because it often grows in ephemeral pans. The *Nymphoides* can replace two sets of alien invasive species - the first semi-aquatic are *Canna indica* (Canna lily or Indian shot) and *Pontederia cordifolia* (Pickerel weed). The second set are the true aquatics that cause huge problems in our freshwater systems - think of Hartebeespoort Dam and even our own Duzi canoe race route. These are *Pistia stratiotes* (Water Lettuce), *Eichhornia crassipes* (Water Hyacinth), *Salvinia molesta* (Kariba Weed), *Azolla filiculoides* (Red Water Fern), as well as *Egeria densa* (Ditch Moss), *Elodea canadensis* (Canadian Waterweed), *Myriophyllum aquaticum* (Parrot's Feather) and *Hydrocleys nymphoides* (Water Poppy) which are all "escaped" aquarium plants. I have included a picture of the Water Poppy. Please do not be fooled by the *Nymphoides* in its name - this is not an indigenous plant and, as pretty as the flower looks, it is an invasive species and should not be planted in a South African garden! So make a point of getting some equally pretty, indigenous *Nymphoides* growing in your garden water features and your farm dams!



**ALIEN INVADER**