

# Duckweed growth causes green carpet on Girard Park pond | News

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BY KATIE GAGLIANO | Staff writer, Katie Gagliano

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The carpet of aquatic plants currently covering the surface of Girard Park's pond might not be pretty to look at, but it's not dangerous to the pond or the public, a park maintenance official said.

The green covering coating the pond is duckweed, said Ross Gresham, Parks and Recreation programs and maintenance manager for Lafayette Consolidated Government.

Duckweed is a tiny, free-floating aquatic plant that grows on the surface of still or barely moving freshwater and wetlands. It is often mistaken for algae. It's a plant that grows rapidly in nutrient-rich environments and can grow into an extensive mat on the water, according to the LSU AgCenter.

That's what's happening at Girard Park, Gresham said. The duckweed began growing rapidly in the pond over the past few weeks.

The plant's growth on the pond may look unappealing, but the plant isn't dangerous. It is not unsafe for the ducks — in fact, they're known to eat it — and visitors can still fish recreationally in the pond, Gresham said.

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Dustin Brown of Pristine Pond Solutions, a pond and waterways management company out of Breaux Bridge, has been working with Gresham on maintenance projects for the pond. Brown said the pond's environment and the current drought conditions have combined to form a perfect storm for the duckweed to thrive.

Recent rains washed dead grass and other natural materials into the pond, which settled at the bottom and joined an already thick layer of decomposing natural material. That material is releasing nutrients that are feeding the growth of the duckweed, Brown said.

"Imagine when you buy organic compost to put in your flower bed and make your flowers thrive. In that pond, you have a natural layer of compost that's built up on the bottom of it. Just years and years of grass clippings and leaves and waste from the ducks and all these organic materials that have built up on the bottom of the pond. Now, your nutrient level is so high that the vegetation, any chance it gets, it does what it's doing right now," he said.

While herbicide treatments or physical removal could provide a short-term solution, it would likely be time and money spent for little benefit because of how few left-behind plants it takes for duckweed to re-proliferate, Brown said.

The pond manager said what the Girard Park pond needs is a couple weeks of good rain to raise the pond's water level and naturally flush the duckweed and excess organic material.

Long term, the best solution for the pond is to install an aeration system that's appropriately sized to the pond and can turn over the water multiple times a day.

The water movement will prevent the growth of plants such as duckweed, which needs still water to thrive, and foster healthy bacteria that will help more quickly decompose materials on the bottom of the pond and keep the nutrient levels at a more balanced level, he said.

The public can help improve conditions at the pond by not feeding the area ducks, Brown said. The uneaten food and the excess duck waste are washed into the pond and settle at the bottom, adding to the already dense volume of organic material breaking down.

Gresham said his department has been working on the pond for months with Brown's company and others on maintenance projects such as physical removal of weeds and other natural materials, and treatment of algae and weeds like southern naiad.

The maintenance manager is hoping to have a new aeration system installed in the pond by this coming spring to make a longer term impact on the quality of the pond's environment.

"We're actively working on getting this pond in a better state. I don't want the public to think we're not doing anything about it. I've been having companies treat this pond for months, working on getting rid of the algae and the weeds. Unfortunately, this duckweed came up and made everything look terrible, and it's kind of out of our control," Gresham said.