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*Aponogeton distachyus*

[Synonyms : *Aponogeton distachyos*]

**WATER HAWTHORN** is an aquatic perennial. Native to the South African Cape it has lily-like, strongly fragrant white or pale blue flowers framed by white leaf-like bracts.

It is also known as Cape asparagus, Cape hawthorn, Cape-pondweed, *Kalatka dvouklasá* (Czech), Water hawthorne, Water ribbon-weed, *Water uintjie* (Afrikaans), Winter hawthorne, and *Zweepcactus* (Dutch).

The scent of the flowers is reminiscent of hawthorn (*Crataegus*) or vanilla (*Vanilla*). When the flower matures to green it bends below the surface of the water to allow the fruit to ripen. These then rise to the surface and float away to be dispersed by the water.

*Distachyus* means ‘with two spikes’ with reference to the arrangement of the flower spikes.

The leaves and the waxy flowering spikes are eaten in some parts of South Africa particularly the Cape where they are highly respected by many as a vegetable. They are usually cooked like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) or pickled.

Water hawthorn is also cultivated as a fragrant aquatic ornamental plant.

Apart from various countries in the northern hemisphere it has also been introduced to some in the South, including Australia. In Western Australia it is now viewed as invasive – so much so that it is one of the invasive aliens about which various conventions of interested parties were called in the 1990s in order to consider the most appropriate methods of control.