Plant Profile

Slender-petaled Waterlily

Nymphaea gracilis

By Tomy Escribano

Plant Name: *Nymphaea gracilis*

Common Name: Also known in the past as *flavovirens.*

Height: 8–12 inches (20–30 cm.)

Flowers: White, fragrant flowers held high above the green foliage. The bloom period is all summer long.

Spread: 6-10 ft. (1.8-3m.)

Sun: Full Sun

Zones: Officially hardy to USDA Hardiness Zones 8–11, but known to survive in Zones 6 and 7.

Type of Plant: Tropical day blooming waterlily

Growing Conditions: Submerge pot so that there is at least 1 foot of water over the heavy, well-fertilized soil.

Short Description: First described by Joseph Gerhard Zuccarini in 1832, it is the only species of its genus endemic* to Mexico and it is considered to be in danger of extinction there. Pure white flowers (10–15cm.), with long-pointed petals and yellow stamens, they stand well above the water (20–30cm.), have a delicate sweet fragrance and remain open from early morning until sunset.

This waterlily species blooms longer than others I've grown. The tubers are quite cold-tolerant and they survive even some hard freezes if they are kept underwater. Excellent to hybridize with, creating high star-shaped blooms. There is a long list of the stunning so-called star cultivars that have this plant in their parentage such as *Nymphaea* 'Rhonda Kay', 'Red Star', and 'Golden Grace' among many others that can be easily found on our IWGS Plant Database.

*The latest distribution study, published in the *Flora* Journal 2026, describes *Nymphaea gracilis* as a Mexican endemic and reports no verified wild populations outside of Mexico.

Nymphaea gracilis photo by Tomy Escribano.

About the Author

Tomy Escribano was born and raised in Barcelona, Spain. At the age of 16 he moved to Madrid, where he lives now. He has always been passionate about nature. Not finishing his biology degree hasn't kept him from learning about all kinds of plants. His former occupation as a flight attendant gave Tomás the opportunity to travel around the world and meet great friends in the waterlily industry. For the last 10 years he has been a volunteer at Caracas, Cali, Cuba, Bogotá, and Madrid's Botanical Garden. He also has a big waterlily collection in his private garden and displayed at Desert City (Madrid). He is on the IWGS Board and is one of the contributors to the IWGS database. On Instagram, he is @Tomyescribano.

*These plants exhibit favorable traits; however, plant growth is also dictated by climate, available nutrients, and overall growing conditions. Care should always be taken to choose plants appropriate to the location. Know the law and never release plants into natural water bodies unless they are indigenous.