

# IS IT BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

# ...OR SOMETHING ELSE?

**Blue-green algae** are bacteria known as *cyanobacteria* and are a natural part of water bodies. With enough sunlight and nutrients, cyanobacteria can grow quickly and form a blue-green algae *bloom*.

- Blooms often look like spilled paint or pea soup and can change the color of the water to green, blue, turquoise, purple, tan, or white.
- **Blue-green algae can produce toxins that can make people and animals sick.**
- In Wisconsin, blooms are most common in the summer, or May to September.
- Blooms have look-alikes, so use your best judgment when choosing a spot to swim. Do not swim in discolored water or where you see foam, scum, or algal mats.

## HARMFUL



**Green water that looks like pea soup**



**Surface scum that looks like spilled paint**



**Floating globs or mats**

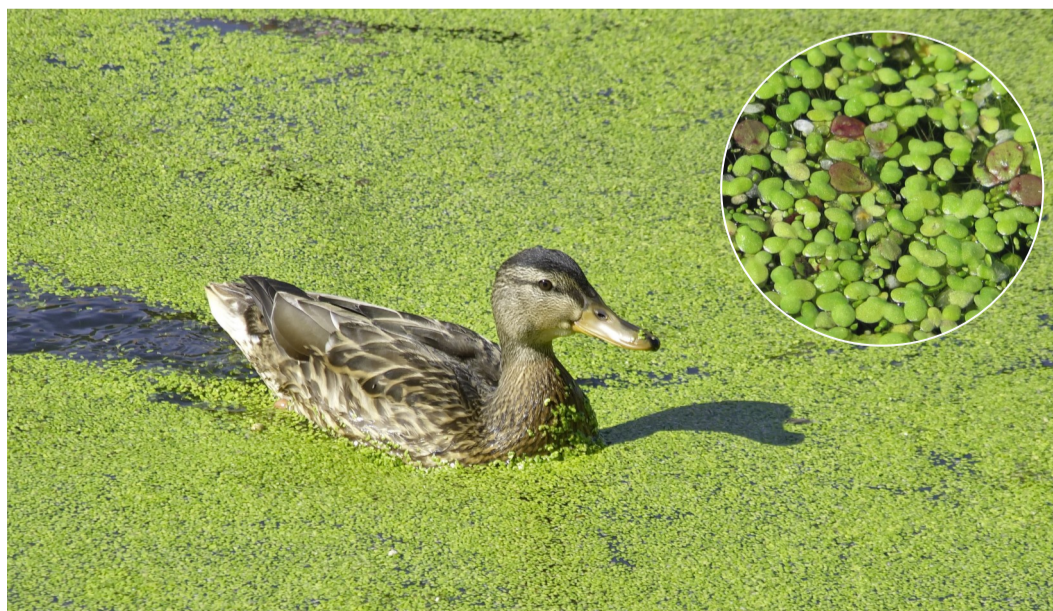
## NOT HARMFUL



**Long, hair-like filamentous green algae**



**Yellow plant pollen**



**Tiny, green floating plants (duckweed)**



To learn more about blue-green algae and their health effects, visit [www.dhs.wi.gov](http://www.dhs.wi.gov) and search "algae"

Wisconsin Department of Health Services  
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