Blue-green algae blooms have captivated public attention in part because of their potential production of toxins. But not all algae blooms are blue-greens and not all blue-green blooms are toxic.

The Lake Champlain Committee is a membership-supported non-profit organization that has been working in New York, Vermont, and Quebec since 1963 to protect the integrity of the Lake Champlain ecosystem and recreational resources through science-based advocacy, education, and research. We welcome your participation!

This flyer is a visual guide to various types of floating phenomena on Lake Champlain. The key should not be relied upon to determine whether or not a blue-green algae bloom contains toxins. It should however, help identify some other common accumulations of plant matter that are often mistaken for blue-green algae.
Duckweed, a plant unrelated to algae, appears algae-like when it proliferates and washes ashore, but you should be able to note that each speck is an individual flattened floating leaf, while blue-green algae have no leaves. There are a number of different species of duckweed, all in the family Lemnaceae. Duckweed is most common in sheltered bays and inlets.

Lake Champlain also experiences blooms of non-toxic green algae such as Cladophora. This species grows attached to rocks and breaks off in clumps that may appear brown or green and stringy. Cladophora do not form paint-like oily slicks. Other examples of algae that are not blue-greens may look like long green hairs, green clumps, yellowish clouds, or gelatinous brown balls.

Accumulations of pollen from pine and other trees may also appear algae-like. Pollen forms a film on the water, but unlike algae it is yellowish and will feel coarse to the touch rather than slimy. When pollen is abundant it will coat items on land as well as in the water. Pollen most often accumulates in spring and early summer.