

INVASIVE EXOTIC

Purple Loosestrife

Lythrum salicaria

Loosestrife Family (Lythraceae)



What does it look like? Purple loosestrife, native to Europe, is a perennial best known for its long showy spikes of purple flowers that dominate infested wetlands during mid- to late summer. The plant can grow 6 ft. to 10 ft. tall with 30 to 50 square stems. The leaves are lance-shaped and grow opposite each other on the stem or in whorls of three.

What habitats are threatened by this plant? Purple loosestrife is most abundant in the Northeast U.S., colonizing wetland habitats including meadows, marshes, riverbanks, and shores of lakes and ponds.

How does it spread? Purple loosestrife propagates vegetatively by root or stem pieces. Each plant can also produce millions of tiny seeds that are carried by wind and water to establish new populations. The seed can be present in dredged soil from waterways and can be spread with the soil

Why is this plant a threat? Many wetlands, once inhabited by a rich diversity of native plants, are now overrun by dense stands of loosestrife, stands that can grow to thousands of acres in size, eliminating open water habitats. The loss of native species and habitat diversity is a significant threat to wildlife, including water fowl, several rare amphibians and butterflies that depend on wetlands for food and shelter.

How can it be controlled? Do not plant purple loosestrife. According to recent research, even so-called infertile cultivars of this plant produce viable seed and should not be planted in the landscape. Substitute native plants such as obedience plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*) and Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*). Pull individual loosestrife plants by hand before seed is set. Larger populations are very difficult to control. Do not dig out roots because soil disturbance may release seeds buried in the soil and break off plant parts, which then reproduce. Frequent cutting of the stems at ground level is effective but must be continued for several years.

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