

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)

What does purple loosestrife look like?

Purple loosestrife is a hardy, European perennial herb that grows 1-9 feet high. The plant is dense and bushy with 1-50 stems, which die back each year. Flowers are purple to magenta in color and bloom from July to September. Leaves are opposite, nearly linear, with smooth edges and downy surfaces. They are attached to four- to many-sided stems without stalks.



www.cwss-scm.ca/Weeds/loosestrife.html

Where does purple loosestrife grow?

Purple loosestrife thrives in a variety of habitats, including wet soils of marshes, lakes, stream margins, alluvial flood plains, sedge meadows, and wet prairies, but it is tolerant of both shallow water and drier soil sites, once established. Purple loosestrife has also been planted in lawns and gardens, which is often how its seed has arrived into many of our wetlands, lakes, and rivers. In Kentucky, purple loosestrife is found mainly in counties bordering the Ohio River, Fayette and Martin County, and along the Red River.

How did purple loosestrife arrive here?

Purple loosestrife was first introduced to eastern North America in the 1800s by settlers who brought the plant for their flower gardens and by seeds that were in the ballast water of European ships.

How does purple loosestrife spread?

A mature plant can annually produce over 2 million tiny seeds, its primary dispersal agent. It can also grow from bits of root or broken stem that readily root in moist soil. Water, animals (especially birds), boats, construction equipment, and people can transport its seeds long distances and they may remain viable in soil for many years. Some uninformed gardeners still buy or trade and plant purple loosestrife. Disturbances, such as water draw-downs, accelerate the invasion by providing open substrate and sunlight for seedlings that quickly fill the wetland with loosestrife.

Why is purple loosestrife a problem?

Once established, purple loosestrife outcompetes and replaces native plants, degrading wildlife habitat and food. If left untreated, this plant can form dense, monospecific stands resulting in decreased biodiversity and lost recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.

How can you help prevent the spread of purple loosestrife?

- Inspect for and remove aquatic plants, mud, and seeds from boats, trailers, gear, clothing and footwear used in infested areas before moving to un-infested areas.
- Learn to identify purple loosestrife, pull young, and small plants wherever found.
- Encourage your local highway department to find alternatives to mowing the plant. Mowing usually helps to spread roots and seeds if timed poorly.
- Help curb local use of the plant – discourage local cultivation and distribution.
- Actively work to control purple loosestrife in a wetland near you.
- Teach others about purple loosestrife and its threats to native plants.