

## *Purple Loosestrife*

*Lythrum salicaria* L.

*Loosestrife family (Lythraceae)*

Nicknamed "Marsh Monster" and "Exotic Invader", purple loosestrife is a noxious weed with nationwide distribution. Purple loosestrife displaces native vegetation and beneficial wetland plants by forming a monoculture in wetland habitats. Purple loosestrife plants colonize and form dense barriers between land and water, which can prevent wildlife from entering waterways.

### *Introduction:*

Native to Eurasia, purple loosestrife was introduced in the United States both intentionally and accidentally. In the 1830's, purple loosestrife was present in ship ballasts. It spread from ships dumping seed contaminated ballasts into seaports, which then spread through branching waterways. It was further distributed by human disturbances.

It is also believed that purple loosestrife was intentionally planted by immigrants for medicinal purposes as it was once believed to cure stomach problems.

Image: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/lysa1.htm>



### *Description:*

Purple loosestrife is a perennial plant that can grow up to 8 feet tall and has multiple stems which give the plant a bushy appearance. 1.2"-4" inch leaves are opposite or whorled in groups of three and lanceolate to linear. Larger leaves are heart-shaped. Sometimes the leaves have short upright hairs. Stems are square and sometimes six-sided. Flowers are purple to magenta and arranged in 4"-16" long terminal spikes. Fused sepals form a tube surrounding the ovary. Petals are attached to the fused tube. Flowering occurs from July-September.

### *Reproduction and spread:*

A single purple loosestrife plant can produce more than 2 million seeds. The seeds are contained within a capsule. In addition to reproduction by seeds propagation, purple loosestrife can also grow from fragments of stems and roots. The seeds remain viable for many years. Seeds can be spread by wildlife and water movement.

### *What is being done?*

There are some states that have introduced two beetles (*Galerucella californiensis* and *Galerucella pusilla*), both identified by extensive testing to insure they feed exclusively on the plant. Since 1992, these beetles have made significant impact on the reduction of purple loosestrife.



***Galerucella californiensis***



***Galerucella pusilla***

Images:

[http://www.biocontrol.ento.vt.edu/PL\\_thumbz.htm](http://www.biocontrol.ento.vt.edu/PL_thumbz.htm)

Sources:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/lysa1.htm>

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