

Purple Loosestrife

Background, Life History

Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is a perennial wetland plant that grows in marshes, wet prairies, along streams, moist fields and pastures, wetlands, ditches, around farm ponds and other wet disturbed habitats. A native of Europe, this plant was accidentally introduced into North America in the mid-1800s. Because it has no natural enemies here, it has spread aggressively into wetlands throughout the northeast and upper mid-west. In the early 1960s, Missouri only had two known documented locations. Currently we are tracking purple loosestrife populations in the northern two-thirds of Missouri counties, although scattered populations exist throughout the state.

Purple loosestrife typically flowers in mid to late June and blooms through August. It has showy purple spikes of flowers, making it an attractive garden flower. The use of purple loosestrife in landscape plantings and flower gardens has added to its spread in Missouri. Several hybrids that are considered non-aggressive are currently commercially available. They include: Morden Pink, The Rocket, Rose Queen, Dropmore Purple, Columbia Pink, Modern Rose and Morden Gleam.

Purple loosestrife ranges from 3 to 10 feet tall. Its stems have four angles or edges, which appear to be semi-woody at the base. Purple loosestrife reproduces prolifically by cuttings and offshoots as well as by seeds. A single plant may produce up to 300,000 seeds, which are carried by the wind, water and animals to new locations.

Impacts

Purple loosestrife is an invasive plant and is listed as a noxious weed in Missouri. It is so aggressive that it crowds out the native plants that are used by wildlife for food and shelter. Purple loosestrife has almost no wildlife food or shelter value. Once established, it can destroy marshes, wetlands and choke Missouri waterways.





Barry Rice, sarrazenia.com, BugWood.org

While the flowers are showy, purple loosestrife is an invasive plant that should never be planted even in a manicured landscape setting.

Control

Because purple loosestrife spreads rapidly, locating and eradicating the first plants to invade a wetland basin or habitat are very important in stopping it from spreading.

Small infestations of up to 100 plants are best eliminated by hand pulling early in the flowering season to avoid scattering seeds during the removal process. Pull as much root system out of the ground as possible. If the plant breaks off at the surface, the root crown will sprout new stems. Place all plants and plant pieces in a bag and remove all stems and plants from the wetland area as discarded plants will create new plants.

Use herbicides to control groups or clusters in excess of 100 plants, up to two acres, and plants too large to pull out by hand. Purple loosestrife can be controlled using herbicides with glyphosate as the active ingredient, such as Round-up for terrestrial sites and Rodeo for aquatic sites. Always follow label instructions.

For large infestations of two acres or more, use a combination of hand pulling, chemical application and biological control. Leaf-eating beetles from the genus *Galerucella* and root-eating weevils from the genus *Hylobius* target purple loosestrife. All biological control efforts are regulated through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The website is www.aphis.usda.gov.



Michigan Department of Natural Resources Archive, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, BugWood.org

Blue vervain, a native plant, is similar to purple loosestrife. However blue vervain's flowers have 5 petals and are bluish purple instead of deep purple. Also blue vervain has toothed, ragged-shaped leaves instead of the smooth-sided leaves of purple loosestrife.

Identifying Purple Loosestrife

- 6 to 10 feet tall
- stiff 4-sided stem
- lance-shaped leaves with smooth edges
- leaves are opposite each other or in whorls of three or more

Replacing Loosestrife

As part of restoration ecology, you can replace your purple loosestrife with an alternative selection of environmentally friendly perennials.

- Blazing star (*Liatis spicata*)
- Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*)
- Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*)
- Swamp loosestrife (*Decodon verticillatus*)
- Winged loosestrife (*Lythrum alatum*)

www.MissouriConservation.org

For more information or to report a population, contact your local Missouri Department of Conservation office, e-mail WildlifeDivision@mdc.mo.gov, or write:

Purple Loosestrife
Missouri Department of Conservation
Invasive Species Coordinator
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