

Invasive plant: “Purple Loosestrife”

Lythrum Salicaria

Origin: Europe

Introduction to US: Purple loosestrife was first introduced to the eastern United States in the 1800's as a medicinal and ornamental plant. As home gardeners planted these plants for their showy flowers and easy care, they have spread. By 1985 Purple Loosestrife had found its way to the West Coast.

Type: Perennial

Description: Lance shaped leaves form an a dense mat atop a 10 foot woody stem. Multiple purple flowers form June through September. As the flower dies, a seed pod will form. A prolific seed producer, each plant can produce up to 2.7 million seeds, each about the size of a grain of sand.

Benefits: Ornamental home garden.

Threats: Purple Loosestrife has destroyed the natural habitat of wildlife living in wetland areas. The blue heron and other water fowl will avoid areas where this plant has invaded. It does not supply food nor is its habitat suitable for wildlife living in and along the waterways. Over one million acres of wetlands per year are overrun with purple loosestrife, threatening our ecosystem.

Controls: Proper identification of a plant assists in the ability to control or remove the plant. The best time to accurately identify purple loosestrife is in late June to early August when it is in bloom but has not gone to seed. **Do not purchase seed mix containing salicaria.** Manually pull the invasive plant, but be careful to remove the entire root! Some states have introduced beetles to destroy the intruder. Others are using biological means for control. Remember, where there is aquatic life, only approved pesticides should be used. Wash thoroughly any item that may come in contact with loosestrife (including boats, trailers, any item that a seed could have contaminated). If there is Purple Loosestrife on your property, it could destroy the wetlands Virginia has enjoyed for hundreds of years. **Consult your extension agent for further information.**

Source: AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species http://www.in.gov/dnr/files/purple_loosestrife.pdf)

