

Lythrum salicaria, purple loosestrife

Appearance: Purple loosestrife is a tall, multi-stemmed (30-50 per plant), perennial forb that can grow up to 10 ft. (3 m) in height.



Foliage: The opposite or whorled leaves are dark-green, lance-shaped, sessile, 1.5-4 in. (3.8-10.2 cm) long and round or heart-shaped at the base.



Flowers: Flowering occurs in July to October, when pink to purplish flowers develop in 4-16 in. (10.2-40.6 cm) long spikes at the tops of the stems. Flowers have 5-7 petals and twice as many stamens as petals.



Fruit: Fruits are capsules that are enclosed in the hairy sepals and contain several reddish brown seeds.



Ecological Threat: Purple loosestrife is a serious invader of many types of wetlands, including wet meadows, prairie potholes, river and stream banks, lake shores, tidal and non-tidal marshes, and ditches. It can quickly form dense stands that completely dominate the area excluding native vegetation. Purple loosestrife can spread very rapidly due to its prolific seed production; each plant can produce up to 2.5 million seeds per year. It can also hybridize with native loosestrife species, potentially depleting the native species gene pool. Purple loosestrife is native to Europe and Asia. It was first introduced into North America in the early 1800s for ornamental and medicinal purposes.

All images are from Images.Bugwood.org. Photographers: Randy Westbrook, U.S. Geological Survey; Bruce Ackley, Ohio State University; Theodore Webster, USDA Agricultural Research Service; Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut; Norman E. Rees, USDA Agricultural Research Service; Ken Chamberlain, Ohio State University.