



Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)

Introduction

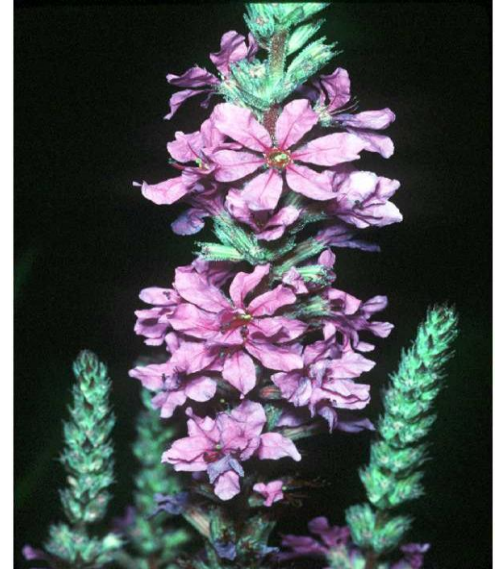
Purple loosestrife is a perennial herb that is native to Eurasia. It arrived in ship's ballasts and is widely used as an ornamental to this day in states that have not banned it. Purple loosestrife adapts well to natural and disturbed wetlands reducing natural vegetation and replacing it with dense, homogeneous stands. These stands reduce biodiversity and have little value or nutrition for wildlife.

Identification

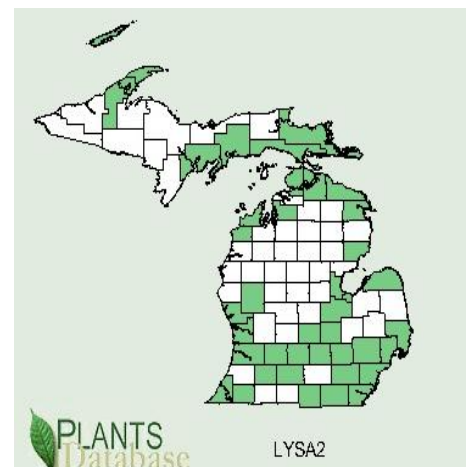
Mature purple loosestrife plants can grow 3 – 10 feet high and have up to 50 stems. The stems are four sided and are green to purple in color. Multiple branches make the plants bushy and woody in appearance and have a downy hair covering them. Their leaves are lance shaped, stalk- less and rounded to heart- shaped at the base; and arranged in pairs or whorls around the stem. Flowers are a showy magenta color that blooms from June to September. Individual flowers have 5 – 7 petals each. Seeds are in capsules that break at maturity from late June to August. It also reproduces frequently through underground stems at a rate of about one foot per year.

Distribution

Purple loosestrife occurs throughout the United States and is heavily concentrated in the northeast. Purple loosestrife is known to invade wet freshwater meadows, river and stream banks, pond edges, reservoirs, and ditches. If well established it can invade dry areas as well. It is estimated that a single stem can produce two to three million seeds per year from a single rootstalk. Seeds can be distributed by animals, machinery and people and by wind or waterways. Purple loosestrife can also reproduce vegetatively by sending up shoots from the root system. These roots can grow up to a foot each growing season.



Robert H. Mohlenbrock @ USDA- NRCS PLANTS Database / USDA SCS 1989. *Midwest wetland flora: Field office illustrated guide to plant species.* Midwest National Technical Center, Lincoln



USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database



Removal/ Control

Mechanical

Small areas of young plants can be pulled by hand. Larger plants can be taken out with a shovel. All plants should be removed before seeding occurs (late July thru August), placed in garbage bags and removed from the site, then disposed of in a landfill or burned. Large populations are very difficult to remove by this means. Mowing is not an option because it can increase the dispersal of seeds by exposing the seed bank.

Chemical

Glyphosate and triclopyr are effective herbicides in nonaquatic settings. They are best applied when plants are preparing for dormancy, in late August. It is important to follow up these applications on a yearly basis to spot treat any new or missed plants.

Biological

A leaf-feeding beetle (*Galerucella californiensis*) has been established as an effective controller/remover of plants, with many sites in Michigan already inhabited with them. Efforts now are focused on field collection and redistribution to sites without beetles present. While the beetles do feed on native plants, the damage to them is considered minimal.

Huron Pines AmeriCorps is supported in part with funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service Commission under a grant from the Michigan Community Service Commission and contributions provided by host sites participating in the program.