

# Purple Loosestrife



flower



seeds



leaves

# Purple Loosestrife

**Genus:** Lythrum

**Species:** *salicaria* and  
*L. virgatum*

**Priority Listing:** 1B

**Perennial**

Purple loosestrife is native to Europe, Asia, northwest Africa and southeastern Australia. This plant was introduced into North America in the 1800's as an **ornamental**.

Purple loosestrife was used as a folk remedy to treat a variety of medical problems including sores and ulcers. Purple loosestrife **inhabits** seasonal wetlands, wet meadows, river and stream banks, the edges of ponds, reservoirs, ditches, irrigation canals and marshes.

Purple loosestrife has a unique four sided stem that can grow up to 5' tall, and is green to purple in color. **Lanceolate** leaves with smooth margins clasp the stem and are heart-shaped or rounded at the base. Both the stem and the leaves are covered with downy fine hairs.

In the fall after the seeds have set, the whole plant turns red in color and then fades to brown about 2 weeks later.

The flowers of the purple loosestrife plant are purple to bright magenta and are clustered on a long spike called a **raceme**. Each flower has 5

to 7 petals and blooms from June to September. Pollination occurs by insects that have long tongues, such as bees and butterflies. The plant sets seeds from July to August, and when the seeds are mature the pod containing the tiny brown teardrop shaped seeds, bursts open. Each raceme of this plant is able to produce about 3 million seeds per year!

Purple loosestrife has an extensive root system consisting of a **taproot** and many short **rhizomes** that form a large mass. This extensive root system can interrupt water flow in streams and clog irrigation canals. Purple loosestrife is a dangerous invader due to the fact that it pushes out all native vegetation such as cattails, therefore displacing the wildlife that relies on these species to build their nests.



Photo courtesy of Norman E. Rees, USDA-ARS

**Inhabits:** to live in, reside in, or be present in

**Lanceolate:** Tapering from a rounded base toward an apex; lance-shaped

**Ornamental:** a plant that serves a purpose for ornament, or is grown for show

**Perennial:** a plant whose life spans several years

**Raceme:** a flower cluster with the separate flowers attached by short equal stalks at equal distances along a central stem

**Rhizomes:** a perennial underground stem that usually grows horizontally

**Taproot:** a main single root of a plant, generally growing straight down

**Vernalize:** a necessary chilling period process for some plants in order to produce flowers, or for some seeds in order to germinate