

Purple Loosestrife



Purple loosestrife displaces native wetland vegetation and degrades wildlife habitat. Eventually, purple loosestrife can overrun wetlands thousands of acres in size, and almost entirely eliminate the open water habitat. The plant can also be detrimental to recreation by choking waterways. The plant's ability to adjust to a wide range of environmental conditions gives it a competitive advantage; coupled with its reproductive strategy, purple loosestrife tends to create monotypic stands that reduce biotic diversity.



Purple loosestrife is a perennial herb 3-7 feet tall with a dense bushy growth of 1-50 stems. The stems, which range from green to purple, die back each year. Showy flowers vary from purple to magenta, possess 5-6 petals aggregated into numerous long spikes, and bloom from July to September. Leaves are opposite, nearly linear, and attached to four-sided stems without stalks. It has a large, woody taproot with fibrous rhizomes that form a dense mat. Purple loosestrife spreads mainly by seed, but it can also spread vegetatively from root or stem segments. A single stalk can produce from 100,000 to 300,000 seeds per year. Mature plants with up to 50 shoots grow over 2 meters high and produce more than two million seeds a year. Plants may be quite large and several years old before they begin flowering.



Pulling purple loosestrife by hand is easiest when plants are young, remove as much of the root system as possible, because broken roots may sprout new plants. Cutting flowering spikes will prevent this year's seeds. Also, remove last year's dry seed heads, they may contain seeds. Cutting stems at the ground to inhibit growth. The use of specially selected insects that feed on purple loosestrife is being studied to determine the effectiveness. Approved herbicide can be applied to individual plants by selective hand spraying. Currently we have no known infestations in the County.