

PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE: BEAUTY OR BEAST?



What is purple loosestrife?

Purple loosestrife is an introduced perennial weed that aggressively invades wetland habitats, destroying these valuable ecosystems and reducing the diversity of native plants. Purple loosestrife plants can grow up to 10 feet tall and produce as many as 50 stems on a single plant. The leaves are opposite, lance-shaped and are directly attached to the stiff, 4-sided stems. Purple flowers are borne on tall spikes from July through September each year. One mature purple loosestrife plant may produce up to 2.5 million seeds each year.

Where does purple loosestrife grow?

In Connecticut, purple loosestrife is found in wet, sunny areas in every county in the state. Typical wetland habitats for this invasive weed include river and stream banks, wet meadows and fields, floodplains, ponds, lakes, marshes, and disturbed areas such as roadsides and construction sites.

Is purple loosestrife a naturally-occurring plant?

No. Purple loosestrife was originally known from Europe and was introduced into the U.S. and Canada in the early 1800s. It is not a native, or naturally-occurring plant in Connecticut or any part of the U.S. but is a ***non-native, invasive*** species.

Why is purple loosestrife a problem?

When purple loosestrife made its way over to America from Europe in the 1800s, all of the beneficial insects that kept populations of purple loosestrife under control in Europe were left behind. As purple loosestrife began to invade wetland habitats in the U.S., it aggressively took over areas where cattails, sedges, rushes, and many other native plant species were growing. Purple loosestrife has since eliminated many of these native plants, which are so important to animals as a food source, for nesting materials and to provide protection for birds, muskrats, turtles and other species. Once purple loosestrife invades a wetland, the area will eventually become a solid stand or monoculture of purple loosestrife, of no value to the wildlife that used to live there.

How can purple loosestrife be controlled?

Young purple loosestrife plants can be pulled by hand, as long as the entire plant and the roots are removed completely. Mowing or hand-pulling older, larger plants or applying herbicides is more difficult, expensive, and may only be a temporary remedy to control purple loosestrife in wetland areas. ***Do not plant purple loosestrife in your garden; consider non-invasive alternative plants.*** **Biological control** is the only long-term solution to

manage purple loosestrife infestations and reduce populations of this invasive weed. Since 1996, beneficial insects (*Galerucella californiensis*, *Galerucella pusilla* and *Nanophyes marmoratus*) have been introduced into Connecticut wetlands to control purple loosestrife and restore the quality of these wildlife habitats. The introduction of beneficial insects is part of a national purple loosestrife biological control program that began in 1992.

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