

Purple loosestrife



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(*Lythrum salicaria* L.)

The most identifiable characteristic of purple loosestrife is the striking rose to purple flowers, which appear from July through mid-September. The flowers are arranged on a spike that can grow several feet tall. Each flower has five to seven petals, which form a two-celled seed capsule. The stems of the plant are erect, 3 to 8 feet tall, and four- to six-angled. The leaves are simple and entire, and can be opposite or whorled. The roots become thick and woody in mature plants but the root crown diameter is limited to about 20 inches. Aerial shoots die back in the fall.

Purple loosestrife spreads primarily by seed, but also can spread from stem cuttings. Each plant produces more than 2 million tiny black seeds that are easily dispersed. The most destructive impact is on the ecology of aquatic sites. The plant forms dense stands that displace native wetland plants and disrupt wildlife habitat. This plant was sold in North Dakota for many years in the nursery trade. Garden cultivars can cross-pollinate and become very aggressive.

