

## Have You Seen This Plant?

As you have been out enjoying all the natural resources that Walworth County has to offer, you may have noticed the great flowers that bloom this time of year. You may also have seen a tall plant with very attractive magenta colored flowers. It could be in your garden, along your shoreline, perhaps in a wetland, even along a wet ditch area. The plant I am referring to is Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria* and while it does have a very pretty flower, but **this is one plant we do not want.**

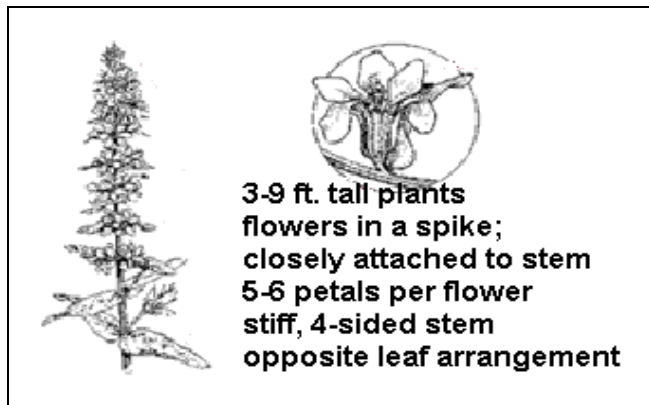
Purple Loosestrife is considered an aquatic invasive species. Native to Europe, it was introduced either accidentally in ballast water or as a garden herb and later became a popular garden plant. Regardless of how it arrived, due to vigorous growth and lack of natural predators, Purple Loosestrife has invaded many of our valuable natural areas. Purple Loosestrife flourishes in moist soils and it can be found in marshes, fens, stream, pond and lake edges. The great diversity of healthy wetlands and shorelines are very important habitat for many native species of birds, insects, amphibians, and animals. Purple Loosestrife, which spreads by seed and underground stems, establishes quickly and out competes the native grasses, sedges and flowering plants that provide food and habitat, which results in a sharp decline in habitat value.

In order to prevent new infestations it is important that that we do not allow Purple Loosestrife to grow in our yards and gardens. In fact, Wisconsin State law prohibits the sale, distribution or cultivation of Purple Loosestrife and all cultivars, hybrids

and varieties of *Lythrum salicaria* and *L. virgatum*. There are several similar flowering plants that can be planted as an alternative, such as: Blazing star, *Liatris pycnostachya*.; Foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea*; Obedient Plant, *Physostegia virginiana* and Steeplebush, *spiraea tomentosa*.

If Purple Loosestrife is found and positively identified, control measures should be implemented immediately. A mature plant can produce 3 million seeds and those seeds remain viable in the soil for several years. If care is taken to minimize soil disturbance, single plants or small populations can sometimes be carefully dug out and disposed of. It is important to make sure all of the root is removed or new shoots will grow. Once plants start to flower it is important to remove the flowering stalks carefully and dispose of them away from water. Allow the plants to dry and burn if possible so that seeds do not disperse. On large sites, chemical control may be an option. Since Purple Loosestrife is most often found growing along water, a DNR permit may be required and the chemical may need to be one that is acceptable for use on water. Contact a WI. Department of Natural Resources aquatic plant specialist for more information at (262) 574-2124. Using either control method will require continued monitoring and control efforts because seeds in the soil will continue to germinate for several years.

In larger, more severe infestations, manual and chemical control may be too expensive or labor intensive. However, the use of specially selected and highly tested insects that feed on Purple Loosestrife have been shown to be highly successful. This method is known as biological control (biocontrol) and research has shown that these specialized insects reduce both plant height, seed output and overall plant numbers. This allows other, native plants to regain control in a few years. Wisconsin DNR and UWEX have created a program in which hundreds of citizens have raised and released millions of beetles that feed on Purple Loosestrife. For more information about Purple Loosestrife please contact Audrey Greene, Lake Specialist for Walworth County at (262) 741-7902, email at [agreen@co.walworth.wi.us](mailto:agreen@co.walworth.wi.us) or Brock Woods (DNR/UWEX) at (608) 221-6349, email at [brock.woods@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:brock.woods@dnr.state.wi.us).



**3-9 ft. tall plants  
flowers in a spike;  
closely attached to stem  
5-6 petals per flower  
stiff, 4-sided stem  
opposite leaf arrangement**