

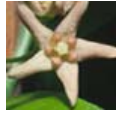


# Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

## Catalog of Species Search Results

### *Lythrum salicaria*

(Purple loosestrife )



[:: Catalog of Species Search](#)



[Common Name\(s\)](#) | [Full Scientific Name](#) | [Family Name Common](#) | [Family Scientific Name](#) | [Images](#) | [Synonyms](#) | [Description](#) | [Similar Species](#) | [Reproductive/Dispersal Mechanisms](#) | [Distribution](#) | [History of Introduction in New England](#) | [Habitats in New England](#) | [Threats](#) | [Early Warning Notes](#) | [Management Links](#) | [Documentation Needs](#) | [Additional Information](#) | [References](#) | [Data Retrieval](#) | [Maps of New England Plant Distribution](#)

#### COMMON NAME

Purple loosestrife

#### FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Lythrum salicaria* L.

#### FAMILY NAME COMMON

Loosestrife family

#### FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Lythraceae

#### IMAGES



Habit

[Inflorescence](#)  
Inflorescence



Incursion



Inflorescence  
close-up



Habitat



Inflorescence  
Close-up

## NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

**Synonyms:** None

## DESCRIPTION

### Botanical Glossary

*Lythrum salicaria* is an herbaceous wetland perennial that can grow 0.5-1.5 m (1.5-5 ft.) tall. The leaves are either opposite or in whorls of three. They can be pubescent or glabrous. They are lanceolate to linear in shape and 3-10 cm (1-4 in.) long. The larger leaves can be cordate or clasping at their bases.

The flowers are purple, magenta or pink. They are numerous and borne on spikes that are between 10 and 40 cm (4-16 in.) long. The hypanthium is linear and twice as long as the sepals. Each flower has 5-7 petals, and the open flowers measure 7-12 mm (0.3-0.5 in.) in diameter. The relative lengths of styles and stamen in these flowers can vary in three different ways. The flowers are in bloom from July to September. The fruits are capsules, each containing numerous reddish-brown seeds.

Page References Bailey 719, Crow & Hellquist 203, Fernald 1048, Gleason & Cronquist 311, Holmgren 292, Magee & Ahles 758, Newcomb 351, Peterson & McKenny 224,288. See reference section below for full citations.

## SIMILAR SPECIES

*Lythrum alatum* Pursch. (winged loosestrife)\* Picture of *L. alatum*

*Lythrum alatum* is a rare plant that could be confused for *L. salicaria*. *Lythrum alatum* is usually shorter in stature, being around 40-80 cm (1-2.5 ft.) tall. The leaves of *L. alatum* are alternately arranged, except for the very lowest ones on the plant. The flowers of *L. alatum* are solitary in the upper axils while the flowers of *L. salicaria* are numerous and in a spike-like arrangement.

## REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

*Lythrum salicaria* reproduces through prolific seed dispersal. The seeds usually fall to the ground after they have ripened. They can

be moved longer distances by water or by becoming attached to waterfowl.

## DISTRIBUTION

The native distribution of *Lythrum salicaria* is central and southern Europe, Great Britain, and parts of Russia. It has been reported from every state in the United States except for Florida, Arizona, Louisiana, Georgia, Alaska and Hawaii. This plant occurs widely in New England.

## HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

The first report of *Lythrum salicaria* in North America was in 1814. Before the year 1900, 14 of 30 populations of this plant were located in estuaries from Massachusetts to New Jersey. The location of these sites would indicate that the plant was introduced somewhere in this area. There are several hypotheses on how this plant was originally introduced. It could have been a part of ship ballast from Europe, or attached to sheep. *Lythrum salicaria* was also planted as a source of nectar for beekeeping, as an ornamental, and for medicinal reasons. By the 1900's there were more inland populations being reported, one of these being in New Hampshire. Since these initial introductions it has spread by being planted in gardens and by waterways.

## HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Coastal Grassland  
Herbaceous Wetland  
Lake or Pond  
River or Stream  
Shrub Wetland  
Wet Meadow  
Yard or Garden

*Lythrum salicaria* is most often found in situations where the soil is moist. However, it prefers areas with shallow water, and does not grow as prolifically in deep-water situations.

## THREATS

*Lythrum salicaria* has the ability to completely dominate wetlands, forming a vast, monotypic stands. These stands prevent the establishment of native wetland plants. It can also have an effect on native wildlife that may not be able to use the plants as effectively for food or cover. By forming these dense stands, *Lythrum salicaria* can clog waterways, causing problems for both commercial and recreational uses of these areas.

*Lythrum salicaria* can produce up to 2.5 million seeds per plant. These seeds persist in the seed bank for years, even if the plants themselves are eradicated from an area. This plant can hybridize

with a native loosestrife, *L. alatum*, which is considered rare in Connecticut. With repeated hybridizations, it is possible that the gene pool for *L. alatum* could be depleted.

## MANAGEMENT LINKS

[Illinois Natural History Survey](#)

General description and management guidelines

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

[The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group](#)

Invasive Plant Management Guide

[Plant Conservation Alliance](#)

Fact sheet with management information

## DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: A photograph of the plant habit, flowers or fruit.

Best time for documentation: Summer, fall.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Integrated Taxonomic Information System](#)

Taxonomic information

[PLANTS Database](#)

General information and map

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

Extensive description, biology, photographs and control information

[Plant Conservation Alliance](#)

Fact sheet that includes images and control information

[Virginia Native Plant Society](#)

General information including control

[Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide](#)

Photographs and description

[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

Description, biology and control information

[National Invasive Species Information Center](#)

Links to more information

[Illinois Nature Preserves Commission](#)

General information and control

[Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program](#)

Identification, fact sheet, management and distribution information

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## DATA RETRIEVAL

Select a task by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- Formatted display as table
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## MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- The whole New England area
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