Common Name: Purple loosestrife

Scientific Name: *Lythrum salicaria* L. and *L. virgatum* L.
Family: Loosestrife family (Lythraceae)

Similar Species: Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*) has leaves alternate on the stem pink flowers borne in long terminal clusters composed of four pinkish-purple petals and four purplish to green sepals.


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Description: Stems square in cross section, to six feet tall, branched, soft haired, from an extensive root system. Flowers borne in leafy stalks, 1-16 inches long. Flowers of 6 green sepals, 5-7 magenta or rarely pink or white petals about ½ inch long. Sepals and petals are fused to form a tube at the base of the flower. Leaves opposite or whorled on the stem, lack stalks, and are lance-shaped, 1-4 inches long.

Life History: Perennial, reproduces from seed but also forms new stems from buds on the thick taproot.

Where Found: Purple loosestrife has not been reported growing wild in Alaska but is included here due to its tremendous destructive potential. A listed noxious weed in several states including Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Washington, but sold legally in Alaska.

Habitat: Favors moist, organic soils but tolerates a wide variety of habitats and can thrive on poor sites. Capable of invading many wetland types, including freshwater wet meadows, tidal and non-tidal marshes, river and stream banks, pond edges, reservoirs, and ditches.

Impacts: Escaped from cultivation, purple loosestrife has spread rapidly in wetland areas around much of the United States and Canada. It is most abundant in the Northeastern US, the Midwest and adjacent Canada, with scattered locations around the west. It forms dense monospecific stands that eliminate other native species. Purple loosestrife provides poor cover and little food or nesting space for birds and other wildlife. In the US, Purple loosestrife causes loss of up to 190,000 hectares of habitat each year. It tolerates a wide variety of soils and soil conditions.

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Control Options: Small populations may be hand pulled. Hand pulling should be done before the plants produce seeds in the late summer. Medium-sized infestations may be controlled with spot applications of glyphosate. Larger infestations have proved difficult to impossible to eradicate. Burning, mowing, flooding and cutting have proved largely ineffective. Several species of beetle are being released to control loosestrife with some success.

Herbicide Options: Glyphosate is effective in the late-flowering stage. Use the proper formulation of glyphosate in and near wetlands.