

# Purple Loosestrife

*Lythrum salicaria*

*Lythrum salicaria*, more commonly known as purple loosestrife, is an invasive wetland plant found commonly in Ohio. It was introduced to North America from Europe and Asia in the early 1800s and at the time was valued for its ornamental and medicinal uses. Today it spans across most of Ohio, mainly found in marshes, wet meadows, ponds, river banks, and ditches. Purple loosestrife has an extended flowering season—June to September— which allows it to produce vast quantities of seed, allowing it to spread very effectively throughout our waterways.

## Identification

### Native



**Size:** Typically 1-4 feet in height.

**Leaves:** Lance-shaped, on upper stem leaves are alternate rather than opposite.

**Flowers:** Short-stalked pale lavender flowers, in the leaf axils on branching stems.

**Stems:** square, have slightly raised ridges or 'wings' that run parallel the length of the stems, hairless.

### Invasive



**Size:** Typically 3-6 feet in height.

**Leaves:** Lance-shaped, opposite or whorled all the way up the stem.

**Flowers:** In a spike up to 20 inches long, densely packed with purple to magenta flowers with 5 to 7 petals.

**Stems:** square and covered in downy hair.

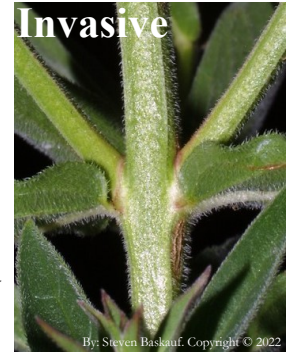
## More Identifying Characteristics



The flowers of the native vs. invasive loosestrife are quite different, including color, shape, size, and density.



The stems of the winged loosestrife have no hair, and the purple loosestrife stems are covered in tiny hairs.



## Control

**Mechanical:** Small infestations of purple loosestrife can be removed by hand pulling. The entire root system must be removed and all plant material should be bagged and thrown away. Mowing is not recommended because of the likelihood of seed dispersal.

**Chemical:** Only apply herbicides approved for aquatic use. For small populations or individual large plants, spot treatment is recommended. For larger infestations herbicides may be most effective when applied late in the season before dormancy. Cutting and treating the stems is also effective. Always follow the label— **it's the law!**

**Biological:** Several species of insects have been shown to be effective in the control of purple loosestrife. *Galerucella* beetles have been approved for control and have been used in Ohio since 1994. The beetles feed primarily on purple loosestrife and do not feed on other plant species. *Hylobius transversovittatus* weevils lay eggs in the stem and the larvae feed on the tissue. *Nonophyes marmoratus* weevils feed on the flowers. Although these insects will not eradicate purple loosestrife, they do control populations at a tolerable level.