

# Purple Loosestrife

*Lythrum salicaria* Loosestrife Family

## Identification Tips

- Tall, showy, magenta flower spikes
- Flowers small and numerous with 5-7 petals
- Develops woody taproot, fibrous roots and rhizomes
- Forms substantial root wads with many stems
- Stems stiff, 4-6 sided, often growing 6-10 feet tall
- Leaves simple, smooth-edged, opposite or whorled
- Usually associated with wet or marshy areas

## Biology

Flowers July to September. Rhizomatous perennial; reproduces by seed, roots, and vegetative growth. Each plant forms up to 2.5 million pepper-size seeds, which float on water and stick to animals. Seeds are viable for 2-3 years. Seed banks can build unnoticed in the soil until the right conditions cause a widespread infestation suddenly to emerge. Mature stands of purple loosestrife can live up to 20 years.

## Impacts

Alters wetland ecosystems by replacing native and beneficial plants. Dense infestations can impede water flow. Displaces nesting habitat for waterfowl, fur-bearing animals, and birds. Agriculture is impacted by loss of wild meadows, hay meadows, and wetland pastures.

## Distribution

Occurs in freshwater and brackish wetlands; found on lakes and waterways throughout King County. Requires partial to full sunlight. Sometimes cultivated as a garden ornamental. Native to Europe and Asia but introduced widely in North America.

## What You Can Do

Do your part by checking regularly for purple loosestrife on your property and along public waterways and wetlands. If you spot a new infestation, please contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.

## Control Methods

Most control methods need to be applied over several years to be successful. When removing purple loosestrife plants, all plant parts and root balls must be transported to a landfill in plastic bags, or in an enclosed or securely tarped vehicle. Due to the highly invasive nature of purple loosestrife, composting is not recommended as a disposal option.

## Prevention:

Beware of varieties sold as ornamentals. If boating in areas with purple

**Class B Noxious Weed:  
Control Required**



*Purple loosestrife quickly invades shorelines and can live up to 20 years.*



*Tall, showy, magenta flower spikes have numerous small flowers with 5-7 petals.*



*Simple, smooth-edged leaves grow opposite or whorled. Stems are 4-6 sided.*

## Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program: **206-477-WEED** [kingcounty.gov/weeds](http://kingcounty.gov/weeds)

loosestrife, check boat hulls, motors, and other equipment for plant fragments that can be transported to new waterways.

**Manual:**

Small infestations can be dug, bagged, and disposed of with trash; take care not to disperse seeds. Mature flowering stems can be cut at base in late summer or early fall to prevent seed production. Brush off boots and clothes before leaving an infested area.

**Mechanical:**

Cutting or mowing by itself is not an effective control option for purple loosestrife. Shoots and adventitious roots will develop. In areas that don't flood, black plastic covering is an interim option for dense seedling infestations. It does not kill mature plants, but it does slow down growth and seed production.

**Chemical:**

**Follow all label directions and local and state regulations regarding herbicide use in sensitive areas.** Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial, and government agency users. Certain herbicides cannot be used in aquatic areas or their buffers. If herbicides are used, make sure that their label specifies your type of site. All aquatic herbicides are restricted-use herbicides. Only licensed aquatic herbicide applicators can purchase and apply these herbicides. Permits are required before applying aquatic herbicides. Aquatic formulations of triclopyr are effective and will reduce damage to native grasses and sedges. Aquatic formulations of glyphosate and imazapyr are also effective but will injure all plants. If plants are in flower, it is recommended that you remove flower heads before applying herbicide to prevent seed production, as well as to avoid spraying bees and other pollinators.

For more information, contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.



**Purple loosestrife can take over wetlands, displacing native plants and wildlife.**

**Could be confused with:**

**Purple loosestrife is sometimes confused with the native plants spirea (*Spiraea douglasii*), fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), and Watson's willowherb (*Epilobium ciliatum* ssp. *watsonii*).**



**Spirea**, or hardhack, is a shrub with round stems and toothed leaf tips. Flowers are tiny and lighter pink, appearing in dense clusters at the top of the plant.



**Fireweed** has round stems and longer leaves with a distinctive mid-vein. Flowers are on stalks and have 4 petals. Long capsules split open to release fluffy white seeds.



**Watson's willowherb** has slightly serrated leaves and much shallower roots. Flowers have 4 deeply notched petals.