

Q: Has Purple Loosestrife been found in this area?

A: The invasive, but beautiful aquatic visitor *Lythrum salicaria*, or Purple Loosestrife has recently been seen in local wetland areas. Originally from Europe, where it is found from Great Britain across Europe into Asia, these erect perennials move swiftly and aggressively into moist habitats, choking out native plants and reducing the biodiversity in these sensitive environments. Once plants become established, they can reach as high as 2m (~10feet) with as many as 50 stems per plant. 2 million viable seeds can be produced by a mature plant annually, attaching themselves to wildlife, people and livestock. The seeds need warm temperatures and available moisture to germinate, but if those conditions are met, seedling densities of 10,000 to 20,000 plants per meter have been counted. The thick, woody rootstock stores resources for spring growth, and spreads underground at the rate of about 40 cm per year. The stems are square, woody with opposite or whorled leaves. The leaves are lance-like and heart-shaped or rounded at the base. A fine downy fuzz or pubescence usually covers the plant, and magenta colored spikes bloom all summer long. Each flower on the spike will have five to seven petals, loaded with nectar for insect pollinators. The plants can be found in freshwater meadows, tidal and non tidal marshes, along river and stream banks, the edges on reservoirs, ditches and ponds.

*Lythrum salicaria* arrived in North America in the early 1800s in ship ballast (which is how other invasive problem plants and animals are still arriving), establishing itself first along the Eastern seaboard. From the coast, it traveled up the canals and into inland waterways, spreading with the help of enthusiasts for the lovely blossoms and its use as honey bee forage. By the late 1900s, it was found across the United States and Canada.

Hand-pulling before the plants set seed is the best control in small areas. Aggressively removing small seedlings will prevent major stands from being able to develop. Several beneficial insects have been released in the United States to try to get a level of bio-control in place. More information is available at <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/lythsali.html>