

Purple Loosestrife

Lythrum salicaria

What are invasive species?

Invasive species are species that are introduced to an area outside of their native range. They can be introduced intentionally or unintentionally.

Why are invasive species a problem?

Once they establish, invasive plants can reproduce quickly because they have no natural predators or pathogens to keep them in check, and they often become the dominant species in an ecosystem. This can have devastating effects on the environment. Invasive species can displace native plants by monopolizing space, light, water and other resources needed for growth. They can completely alter native plant communities and drastically lower biodiversity. Invasive species can also adversely affect the economy and human health, and interfere with recreational activities.

HISTORY

Purple loosestrife originally came from Europe. It was introduced to North America intentionally as an ornamental garden plant. It was also brought to North America unintentionally in soil used as ballast for ships. Purple loosestrife quickly spread its seed and escaped from gardens, and is now found throughout most of North America. In PEI, purple loosestrife can be found surrounding a number of ponds and in many gardens.

IDENTIFICATION

Purple loosestrife is often confused with Fireweed, which is a native plant on PEI. Here are a few features you can use to distinguish between the two and to positively identify purple loosestrife:

- Purple loosestrife has a square stem, while Fireweed has a smooth, round stem
- Purple loosestrife leaves can be oppositely, alternate, or whorled, while Fireweed leaves are alternately arranged
- Leaves attach directly to stem
- 1-2m tall



- Flowers are small and purple, and many individual flowers grow on a single spike
- Bloom late June-September
- Can have as many as 50 shoots coming off a single root
- Leaves turn bright red in the fall
- Leaves and stem are covered with short, fine hairs

CONCERN

Purple loosestrife has an extraordinary ability to produce and spread massive amounts of seeds every growing season. This means purple loosestrife can spread very far distances. It often forms dense stands and forces native plants out. This can be harmful for wildlife that use native plants for food and shelter. Purple loosestrife can also alter the width of waterways, which can impact recreational activities and increase the risk of flooding.

HABITAT

Purple loosestrife prefers full sun but can tolerate part shade. It thrives in freshwater environments, such as: marshes, bogs, ditches and stream and riverbanks. However, it can also establish in drier areas, especially if they are recently disturbed.





CONTROL

Purple loosestrife is difficult to control. Mowing or burning may destroy the above-ground portion of the plant but it leaves the root system intact, which a new plant will readily sprout from. Biological controls used to control purple loosestrife have been met with some success. Purple loosestrife beetles were released in 2009 at twenty-five sites across PEI. A decrease in the loosestrife population was seen in many of those locations. To eradicate small populations, without resorting to such extreme measures, hand-pulling works well. For complete eradication, try to remove as much of the root system as possible and revisit the site in the following years to remove any plants that were missed. Any invasive plant materials removed from a site should be placed in plastic bags and transported to a waste management facility for incineration. In addition, it is imperative that native species be planted where invasive species were removed from to prevent future invasions.

How can you help?

Here are a few things you can do to help stop the introduction and spread of alien invasive species:

- Learn more about invasive species in PEI, including how to identify species of concern
- Choose native species whenever possible
- Carefully inspect and clean clothing, gear, animals, and vehicles before visiting a new natural area
- Never dump garden or pond waste in a natural area
- When disposing of invasive species, they should be placed in a clear or dark plastic bag and taken to Island Waste Management for incineration
- Report a sighting

How to report:

If you think you have seen this invasive species on Prince Edward Island, please report your sighting to Island Nature Trust by phone or e-mail

Phone: (902) 892-7513

Email: intrust@eastlink.ca

GARDEN ALTERNATIVES

Spotted Joe-Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*) is native to PEI. It has growing requirements that are similar to purple loosestrife. Both grow best in full sun and in wet environments. They also grow to be 1-2m tall and both bloom June-September. Spotted Joe-Pye weed's flower is less purple and more pink than the flower of purple loosestrife.



Fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium*) is native to PEI. Fireweed and purple loosestrife share a similar form. Both are 1-2m tall, upright, and produce vertical clusters of flowers at the end of a stalk. Fireweed flowers are pink and bloom June-September. Fireweed thrives in full sun and prefers wet or burned areas, hence its name. It also grows well in gardens, but it should be given a large space because it will spread easily.

Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*) is not native to PEI. However, it is a common garden plant and is not invasive. Its leaves are grass-like and it produces tall spikes that bear many small, magenta-purple flowers which bloom mid-summer to early fall. Gayfeather is known to attract hummingbirds and butterflies.



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