

Purple Loosestrife

Lythrum salicaria

Loosestrife Family

Class B Noxious Weed: Control Required

Identification Tips

- Tall, showy, magenta flower spikes
- Flowers small and numerous with 5-7 petals
- Develops woody tap root, fibrous root and rhizomes
- Forms substantial root wads with many stems
- Stiff, four-sided stems, often growing 6 to 10 feet tall
- Leaves simple, smooth edged and opposite or whorled
- Usually associated with moist or marshy areas

Biology

- Rhizomatous perennial; reproduces by seed, roots and vegetative growth
- Forms up to 2.5 million, pepper-size seeds per plant
- Seed banks build unnoticed for years, then under the right conditions a widespread infestation may suddenly emerge
- Seeds float on water and stick to animals
- Mature stands of purple loosestrife can live up to 20 years
- Flowers July to September

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 a loss of wild meadows, hay meadows and wetland pastures

Distribution

- Occurs in freshwater and brackish wetlands
- Found on lakes and waterways throughout King County
- Sometimes cultivated as a garden ornamental



Impact: purple loosestrife can take over wetlands, displacing native plants and wildlife.



This weed features long flower spikes.



Purple loosestrife quickly invades shorelines.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control
Program Line: 206-296-0290
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

What You Can Do

Do your part by checking regularly for purple loosestrife on your property and along public waterways and wetlands. If a new infestation on public lands is spotted, please contact the King County Noxious Weed Control program.

Control Methods

Most control methods need to be applied over several years to be successful. Often, a combination of methods will be more effective than one by itself.

Prevention: Beware of varieties sold as ornamentals. If boating in areas with purple 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, taking 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 the infested area.

Mechanical: Cutting or mowing by itself is not an effective control option for purple loosestrife. Shoots and adventitious roots will develop. 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: Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. **Follow all label directions and local regulations regarding herbicide use in sensitive areas.** 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. Purchase and application of these herbicides can only be done by licensed aquatic herbicide applicators. Permits are required before applying aquatic herbicides. For site specific herbicide recommendations, please contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.



It may look pretty, but purple loosestrife is a dangerous invader.



Left to right: purple loosestrife, native spiraea, native fireweed.

The look-alikes: purple loosestrife is sometimes confused with the native plants spiraea and fireweed. Spiraea or hardhack (*spiraea douglasii*) 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 (*Epilobium angustifolium*) has round stems and longer leaves with a distinctive mid-vein. Flowers are on stalks and have four petals. Long capsules split open to release fluffy white seeds.