Don't Be Fooled By These Look-Alikes

***Swamp Loosestrife**: Individual flowers ring the stem above leaf pairs. They do not form a flower spike like purple loosestrife.*

***Fireweed**: The conical flower spike is 10-13 cm (4-5 inches) wide at the base. Stem is round and leaves alternate.*

***Blue Vervain**: Small purple flower spikes; edges of leaves are toothed.*

***Winged Loosestrife**: Leaves alternate with small stems attaching to main stem.*

Photo by M.J. Oldham

Purple Loosestrife Project

Purple Loosestrife Bio-control Project

Wood County Land Conservation Department is working in partnership with schools on a project to help control the invasive plant purple loose-strife. This plant is a native of Europe and causes significant damage to wetland plant communities in Wisconsin. The Department of Natural Resources has initiated a "bio-control" program in which loosestrife feeding beetles are propagated and released to control the invasive plant.

For the project, Land Conservation Department staff obtain permits and dig up several existing purple loosestrife plants to work as host plants for the beetles to reproduce on. We then work with students to plant and care for these plants. These plants are covered with netting to prevent beetles from escaping and to prevent predators from getting to the beetles. Next 10 adult loosestrife-feeding beetles are placed on the plants. When the beetles have multiplied to over 500 per plant they are released in an area of purple loosestrife infestation.

This method has been the only control measure that has been effective at controlling purple loosestrife on many state-owned properties.

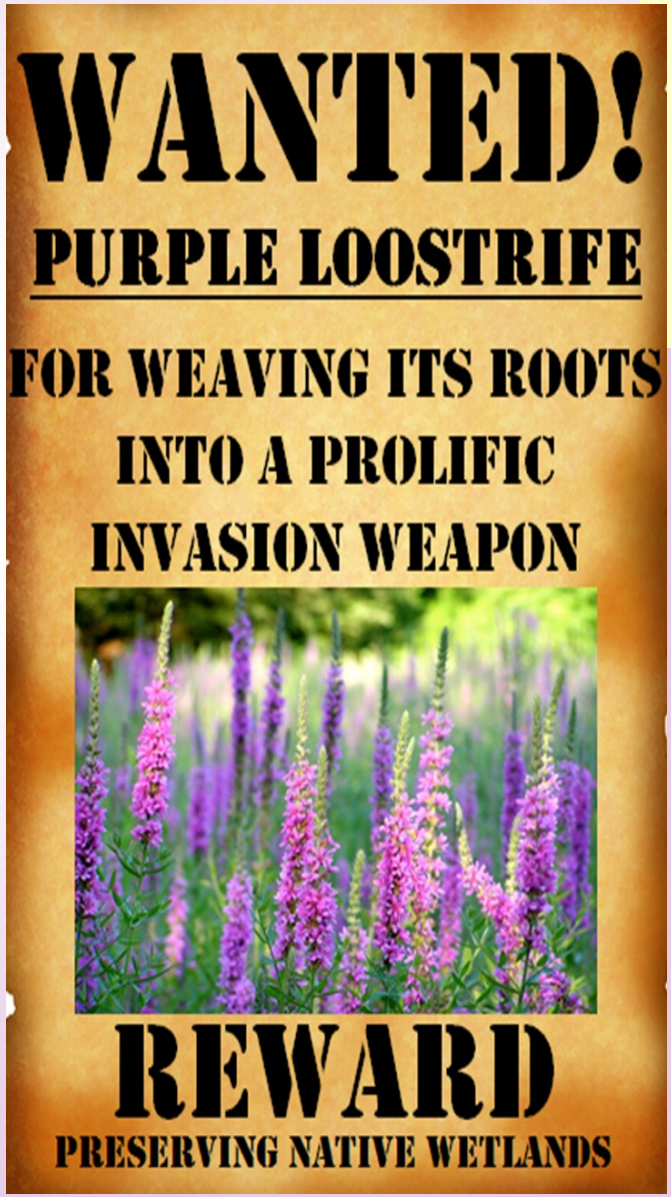
If you have an interest in taking part in this project, or would like to start one of your own, please contact

Wood County Land Conservation Department

(715) 421-8475

landcons@co.wood.wi.us

Wood County Needs Your Help!



The Problem

Purple loosestrife is a very hardy perennial which can rapidly degrade wetlands, diminishing their value for wildlife habitat. Wetlands are the most biologically diverse habitat we have and when purple loosestrife gets a foothold the habitat quickly becomes choked under a sea of purple flowers. An estimated 469,500 acres of wetlands, marshes, pastures and riparian meadows are affected in North America each year.

Why Should Purple Loosestrife Concern You?

- Wetlands may store and filter less water.
- Millions of dollars spent to preserve wetlands would be wasted.
- Recreational uses of wetland for hunting, trapping, fishing and bird watching decrease. Thick growth of purple loosestrife can impede boat travel.
- Most wetland animals depend on native vegetation for food and shelter.
- Plant diversity in wetlands declines dramatically and many rare endangered plants become threatened.

HOW TO IDENTIFY PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Before control activities begin, use the following diagram to be sure you are correctly identifying purple loosestrife.

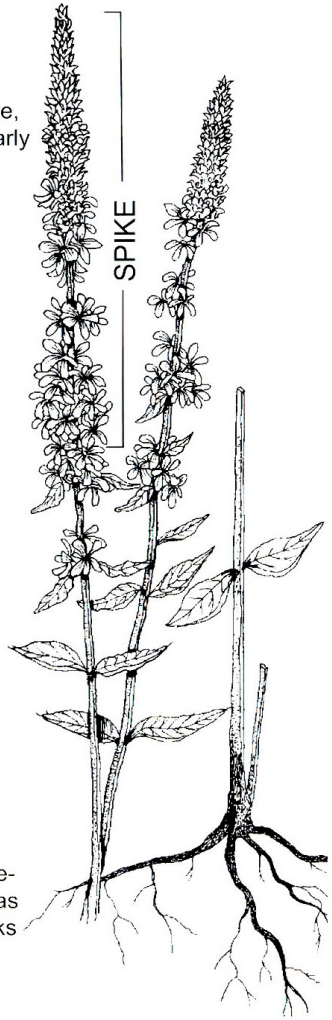
Flower: Individual flowers have five or six pink-purple petals surrounding small, yellow centers. Each flower spike is made up of many individual flowers.

(Not to scale)

Seed Capsule: As flowers begin to drop off, capsules containing many tiny seeds appear in their place. Depending on where you live, plants may go to seed as early as late July.

(Not to scale)

Seed: Each mature plant can produce up to 2.7 million seeds annually. As tiny as grains of sand, seeds are easily spread by water, wind, wildlife and humans. Germination can occur the following season, but seeds may lay dormant for several years before sprouting.



Leaves: Leaves are downy, with smooth edges. They are usually arranged opposite each other in pairs which alternate down the stalk at 90° angles, however, they may appear in groups of three.

Stalk: Stalks are square, five- or six-sided, woody, as tall as 2m (6+ ft.) with several stalks on mature plants.

Perennial Rootstock: On mature plants, rootstocks are extensive and can send out up to 30 to 50 shoots, creating a dense web which chokes out other native plant life.

How To Control Purple Loosestrife

Digging & Hand Pulling -Easiest when plants are young or in sand. Older plants have larger roots and can be eased out by a garden fork. Remove as much of the root system as possible, because broken roots may sprout new plants.

Biological Control - In areas of severe purple loosestrife infestation, the use of Galerucella Beetles that feed only on purple loosestrife leaves is a great option. Raise "Cella" beetles in your backyard for local release with free gear from WDNR. Call 608-221-6349 if you'd like to raise beetles to control purple loosestrife near you!

(Not to scale)

Cutting - Removing flowering spikes will prevent this year's seeds from producing more plants. Remember each mature plant can produce over 2 million seeds per year. Cut stems at ground level to inhibit growth.

Chemical Control -If an infestation is in a dry, upland area, and on your own property, an approved herbicide can be applied to individual plants. Broadcast spraying is not recommended as it kills all broad leaf plants, leaving the area open for further invasion. If using an approved spray be very cautious of spraying near waterways. Training and Permits need to be acquired.