

“B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant, but may have limited distribution in some counties

Purple loosestrife
Lythrum salicaria

Other common names: Purple Lythrum, spiked loosestrife

USDA symbol: LYSA2
ODA rating: B



Introduction: Eurasian in origin, purple loosestrife was introduced into the east coast of North America in the 1800s. It has become established in the U.S. and all Canadian border provinces. Loosestrife is a serious invader of wetlands, rendering them unsuitable for waterfowl and other birds. A successful biocontrol program has reduced loosestrife populations nationwide.

Distribution in Oregon: Purple loosestrife occurs in most Oregon counties wherever suitable habitat occurs.

Description: Purple loosestrife is a perennial aquatic invader growing up to seven feet tall supported by a large rhizomatous root mass. Growing as an upright bushy plant, it becomes adorned with spikes of purple flowers providing an abundance of nectar for honeybees. Flower color ranges from pink to purple, each flower possessing 5-6 petals and arrayed densely on a long spike. The seeds are tiny, dust-like, moved by water and birds. This former ornamental species can be found along wetlands, stream banks, and shorelines of shallow ponds.

Impacts: Seeds escaping from ornamental plantings were transported into wetlands, lakes, and rivers. Once in aquatic systems, seed was rapidly dispersed by moving water and birds to additional areas. Decreased waterfowl and songbird production has been well documented in heavily infested marshes. Many rare and endangered wetland plant and animal populations had become at risk from purple loosestrife impenetrable stands though the biocontrol insects have reduced that risk significantly.

Biological controls: Four biocontrol agents, two leaf beetles, a root weevil and a seed weevil, are well established in Oregon.

