

# Get to Know Invasive Plants! *Purple Loosestrife*

## What does Purple Loosestrife look like?

One of the most easily recognizable features of purple loosestrife any time of the year is its ridged, square stem. A single plant can produce many stems growing from a central, woody root mass. The leaves are smooth, opposite, and attached directly to the stem. Plants can grow from a few inches tall when young to as tall as five feet. Loosestrife flowers in late June to late September. The flowers are pink-purple and are tightly clustered on a long spike.

## Why is Purple Loosestrife a problem?

Purple loosestrife can rapidly degrade wetlands, diminishing their value for the hundreds of species of plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, fish and amphibians that rely on healthy wetland habitat for their survival. Once purple loosestrife gets a foothold, the habitat where fish and wildlife feed, seek shelter, reproduce and rear young, quickly becomes choked under a sea of purple flowers. Besides that, the estimated economic impact in areas where it has already taken over runs to the millions of dollars.

## How does Purple Loosestrife escape from my garden?

Each purple loosestrife plant is capable of producing an enormous number of seeds, up to three million every year. The seeds are small, light and are easily dispersed by the wind, which carries them great distances. In addition, loosestrife seeds remain viable for many years in the soil or submerged under water. It can also spread vegetatively by pieces of the stems or roots. Seeds can be transported by animals, on clothing or vehicles, and rainfall carries them into river systems and wetlands through storm water run-off.



Fireweed (native)

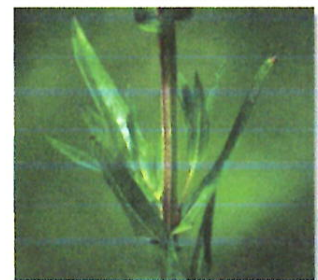
Purple loosestrife (invasive)

Don't confuse invasive purple loosestrife (right) with look-alikes such as fireweed (left), a beneficial native plant.

## Don't Confuse These Native Plants with Loosestrife!



Purple Loosestrife can have multiple stems and flower heads which produce millions of seeds.



Purple Loosestrife stems are square and ridged.



Purple loosestrife leaves are smooth and opposite on the stem, with distinctive 'scallop' veins.



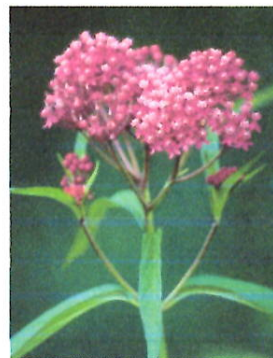
Purple loosestrife flowers have five or six petals.



**FIREWEED:** A native plant found in wetlands and wet prairies. Flowers have only 4 petals plus 4 narrow bracts; spikes are wider than loosestrife, tapering to a tip.



**BLUE VERVAIN:** Another native wetland plant with small flowers on a tall spike. The flowers are much more blue than loosestrife, and the leaves have toothed edges, not smooth like loosestrife.



**MARSH or SWAMP MILKWEED:** A wetland native butterfly favorite, with flower heads that are round to slightly flat-topped. Its leaves are opposite, similar to loosestrife; so be sure to check the flower shape!



**JOE-PYE WEED:** A native wetland plant growing 2 to 7 feet tall, with 3 to 6 whorled leaves on stem and round flower head

For more information or to report a sighting, call: **Alger Conservation District, 906-387-2222**  
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