Purple Loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria)

**Key ID Features**

- **Arrangement:** opposite/whorled
- **Leaves:** simple, lance shaped
- **Flowers:** purple/pink flowers in long spike at top of stem, flowers have 5-7 petals
- **Fruit:** seed capsule enclosed in hairy sepals, reddish-brown seeds
- **Stem:** square, upright, hairy
- **Root:** thick taproot with lateral roots
- **Growth Habit:** multi-stemmed herbaceous perennial, can grow 3-5 ft. tall

**The Impact**

Purple Loosestrife (also called “Purple Lythrum” or “Spiked Loosestrife”) was brought to the United States from Europe in the 1800s as a garden plant and in the ballast of ships. Purple Loosestrife can produce over 2.7 million seeds per year per plant, quickly dominating wetlands and displacing native plants. It can hybridize with the native and rare Winged Loosestrife (Lythrum alatum), potentially depleting the native species gene pool.

When the plants decompose, they release tannic acid into the water, increasing the acidity of the environment, which has been shown to increases the mortality rate of the American Toad.
Quick Facts

Plant Family: Lythraceae
Origin: Europe
Habitat: disturbed areas, marshes, meadows and fields, swamps, edges of wetlands, rivers, and lakes
Present in Vermont?: yes
Method of Spread: primarily by seeds dispersed via water
Status: Class B Noxious Weed*

*The Vermont Noxious Weed Quarantine listing means it is illegal to buy, sell, or transport this species in Vermont

REPORT IT! This is an Early Detection Species. Please report any sightings at: vtinvasives.org/get-involved/report-it

Native Plant Alternatives

Bee Balm / Wild Bergamot
(Monarda fistulosa): attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, grows in a variety of soils, can be used to make tea

Pickerelweed
(Potentilla cordata): attracts bees and butterflies, grows on shorelines and wetlands, young stems and leaves are edible

Common Look-alikes

Fireweed
Distinguishing features
Arrangement: alternate leaves

Blue Vervain
Distinguishing features
Flower: bluish purple with 5 fused petals

Control Information

To learn more about identification & control options, check out the Gallery of Land Invasives on VTinvasives.org and these additional resources:


References:
Ohio State University Weed Guide - Purple Loosestrife, Ontario’s Invading Species Awareness Program - Purple Loosestrife, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources - Purple Loosestrife, Noxious Weeds in King County, Washington - Purple Loosestrife, Ontario Invasive Species Factsheets (PDFs) - Purple Loosestrife

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