

### **Purple Loosestrife** *Lythrum salicaria*

#### **Biology:**

An erect, hardy perennial most easily identified by its showy magenta flowers that appear from July to September. Flowers are five - six petaled and are borne close to the stem on terminal spikes. Opposite leaf arrangement is typical but leaves may also be found in whorls of three or four, and sometimes are alternate on the stem. Stems are stiff, four to six - sided, and angular. Mature plants grow from 1.5 - 8 feet tall. As many as 30 - 50 stems may arise from one root system, forming a large bushy cluster.

#### **Habitat:**

Grows in a variety of habitats that are wet or moist for at least part of the year. It is common in wet meadows, marshes, river banks, and the edges of ponds and reservoirs. It is tolerant of a wide variety of moisture, nutrient and pH conditions. It thrives in disturbed wetlands.

#### **Origin:**

Native to Eurasia.

#### **NY and Adirondack Range:**

Throughout most of NYS. Central NY has massive areas dominated by Purple Loosestrife.

#### **Spread:**

Introduced into America in the early 1800s as an ornamental and for honey bee forage. Cultivars are still widely sold by commercial nurseries. Many of the cultivars are advertised as being infertile

but in fact are highly fertile when crossed among themselves and with wild plants. Wild plants spread by seeds (viable in soil and water for many years), rhizomes, and plant fragments. Flowers from an older plant can produce up to 2 million seeds.

#### **Problems:**

Purple Loosestrife crowds out native wetland vegetation, such as cattails, grasses, sedges and rushes. The impact of this plant on native wetland vegetation has been disastrous, with monotypic Purple Loosestrife stands virtually eliminating all other plants. Biological control efforts are being undertaken in many parts of the state with European beetles and weevils.

