

# PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

(*Lythrum salicaria*)

Oneida Lake Status:  
Common



Purple loosestrife flowers  
Bernd Blossy

- Prolific, brilliant purple plant
- Outcompetes native cattails
- Has been successfully controlled in some areas using a natural beetle predator

Purple loosestrife is a prolific plant with brilliant purple flowers that was introduced to the Atlantic coast of North America in the early 1800s and spread inland along railroads and canals. The construction of the Erie-Barge Canal may have hastened this plant's arrival to Oneida Lake. Stands of loosestrife occupy wetlands and ditches around the lake, and stretches of the lake's shoreline as well.



A lakeside stand of purple loosestrife

In areas where purple loosestrife dominates, native cattails (*Typha latifolia*) are usually absent. The loss of cattail stands means the loss of prime habitat for waterfowl and other marsh animals. In addition, the replacement of the native cattail by introduced purple

loosestrife negatively impacts other smaller organisms including the survival and development of American toad tadpoles (*Bufo americanus*) through a combination of direct toxicity and shifts in algal communities.

Purple loosestrife has been reduced in recent years by the use of biocontrol. Biocontrol involves the release of a natural predator, the purple loosestrife leaf beetle (photo left). This beetle, when present in large numbers, can totally defoliate the plants making it impossible for them to reproduce. The beetles are host-specific. That means they will only attack purple loosestrife, allowing native species such as cattail to rebound.



A mixed stand of purple loosestrife and native cattail  
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Purple loosestrife leaf beetle  
(*Galerucella californiensis*)  
Oregon Invasive Species Council

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