

Weed Awareness

Purple Loosestrife is Invading Lincoln's Streams

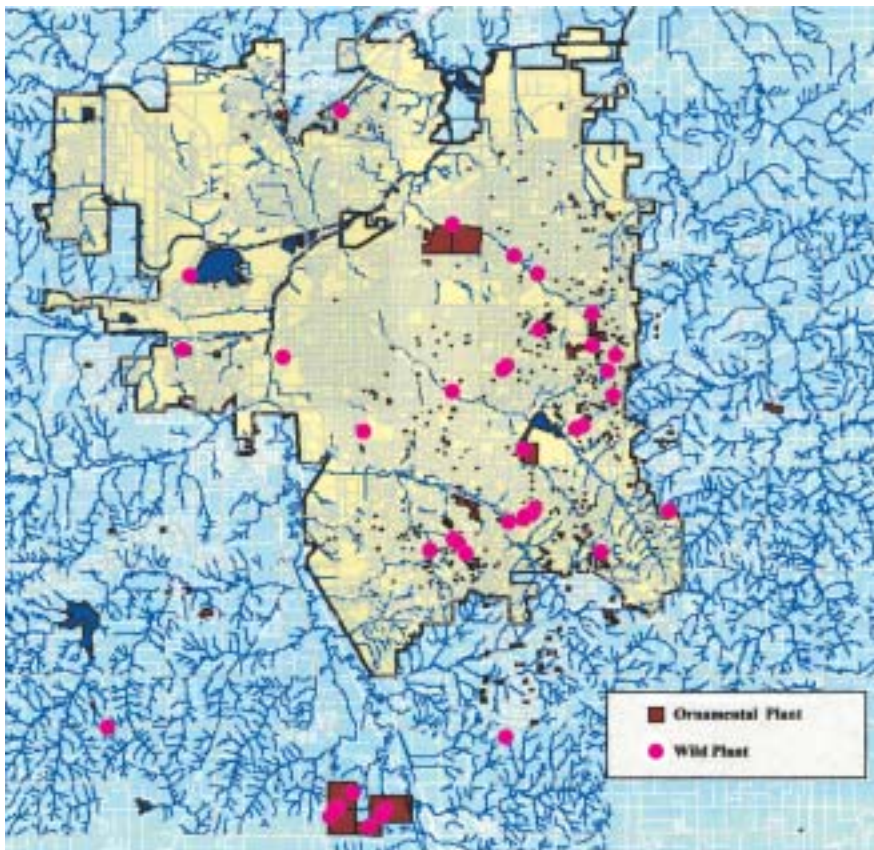
Purple loosestrife infestations in Lancaster County nearly doubled last year, from 129 to 251. It is a serious threat to Nebraska's wetlands and waterways.

Displacing native wetland vegetation, purple loosestrife degrades wildlife habitat, displaces rare plants and animals and chokes waterways. As native vegetation is displaced, rare plants are often the first species to disappear.

Prior to 2001, when purple loosestrife was designated a noxious weed in Nebraska, ornamental purple loosestrife (Lythrum) had been planted in many local yards. Recent studies prove ornamental Lythrum cultivars, which were once thought to be sterile, **can** and **do** produce viable seed.

A mature purple loosestrife plant can produce over two million seeds. The seeds are so small they are readily transported by rain runoff to drainages and streams where they will germinate in a saturated soil condition. In nearly all cases, Lythrum spreads via pollen and seed transfer without the gardener's knowledge.

Wild purple loosestrife plants have been found in many of the Lincoln streams downstream from ornamental plantings. This includes Dead Man's Run, Antelope Creek, Beal Slough and their tributaries. To date, wild plants have not been found in Salt Creek. These wild plants need to be



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Taylor Park



Above Holmes Lake

found and controlled before their populations explode and they form solid dense stands of purple loosestrife in the Salt Creek system.

When seed from domestic plants find its way into natural and agricultural areas, new stands of wild purple loosestrife sprout. Any sunny or partly shaded wetland or riparian area is susceptible to purple loosestrife invasion. The seeds will not probably germinate in a yard unless there are areas that are excessively wet such as around a pond on an acreage.

Many Lincoln homeowners have removed lythrum plantings from their yards. The Lancaster County Weed Control Authority has notified almost 1,000 homeowners they need to remove their ornamental purple loosestrife plantings. These homeowners and many others have voluntarily done so.

Even though we think most of the ornamental plants have been removed, a plentiful supply of seeds have been transported to low lying areas and will remain in the soil until conditions are right for them to germinate.

Homeowners Need to Remove Lythrum Plants

As of 2001, state law bans the sale, offering for sale, distribution, planting or cultivation of purple loosestrife. This ban covers both *Lythrum salicaria* and *L. virgatum*. There are no exceptions for cultivars, hybrids or so-called sterile varieties. Sale violations of purple loosestrife should be reported to the Department of Agriculture.

Plants may have been purchased and planted legally before 2001, but are now illegal and should be removed.

Lythrum plants have many horticultural names, some of which are:

- Rose Queen
- The Rocket
- Morden Pink or Rose
- Morden's Gleam
- Dropmore Purple
- Columbia Pink
- The Beacon
- Fire Candle
- Atropurpureum
- Happy
- Roseum Superbum
- Purple Spire
- Mr. Robert's or Robert's
- Lady Sackville

Currently, about 31 states have laws prohibiting Lythrum importation or distribution because of its aggressively invasive characteristics.

Control Methods

Any control method you select should be repeated for several years to catch missed plants and those reestablishing from seed or regrowth from root parts.

Hand Pulling/Digging

Small young plants can be hand pulled, especially those rooted in loose soil. Be sure to get the entire root.



Ornamental purple loosestrife (*Lythrum*) in a landscape.

Roots left behind will resprout. Older plants are generally too big for pulling and are difficult to dig up. Avoid excessive soil disturbance. If this is unavoidable, consider chemical methods. Handle plants prior to the onset of seeds (which begins in early August), or cut and bag the seed heads to avoid spreading seeds. Removed plant parts should be placed in a garbage bag and put out for garbage pickup. Don't throw them in your compost pile.

Herbicide Application

Careful use of herbicide is the most effective, efficient and least destructive means of removing large purple loosestrife plants. Currently glyphosate is the most effective active ingredient for killing loosestrife. It comes in two forms: (1) "Roundup" for use on dry sites and (2) "Rodeo" for use on wet or standing water sites. Glyphosate must be applied in late July or August to be most effective. It can be sprayed onto loosestrife foliage in a one percent solution. Glyphosate is a nonselective herbicide, however, and will kill any green foliage that it comes in contact with. Great care must be taken to avoid treating non-target plants. Follow all label instructions when using herbicides.

Lancaster County Weed Control Web site

The Lancaster County Weed Control Authority Web site at www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/cnty/weeds provides very useful information about the Authority's program and activities and about weed control and management. The site is continually being updated.

Via the Web site, you can:

- Contact the Weed Control Authority.
- Make a weed complaint.
- Make a real-time search of current weed inspections.
- Look at a map of noxious weed locations in the county.
- See the latest listing of possible weed special assessments.
- Study noxious weed and weed abatement laws and regulations.
- Learn about noxious weed identification.
- Read about the County Noxious Weed and City Weed Abatement Programs.
- See plans and reports.
- Check on noxious weed controls.
- Learn about managing natural areas in an urban setting.
- Test your knowledge about Nebraska weeds.
- Link to other weed control Web sites



Current Weed Inspections Search

You may access information on the Web site about any active inspection made by the authority.

All inspections are shown for sites with infestations not yet under control. You may search for individual sites by entering the address of the parcel, the parcel ID number or the owner's name. You may also look at all the inspections for a weed problem: musk thistle, plumeless thistle, Canada thistle, leafy spurge purple loosestrife or weed abatement in Lincoln.