Lythrum salicaria

COMMON NAMES
purple loosestrife

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Tall emergent perennial herb. Normally 60-100 cm tall, but can grow taller. Purple flowers in dense terminal spikes. Stems are angled (4-6 sided). The stalkless leaves can be opposite, often with alternating pairs at 90 degree angles, or sometimes in whorls of 3 near the base. The upper leaves and floral bracts can be alternate. The leaves are 5-12 cm long, wider and rounded or heart-shaped at the base. Leaf shape varies from lanceolate to narrowly oblong. Leaf sometimes covered with fine hairs.

Lake Horowhenua. Jan 2009. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

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FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Hairy perennial herb growing from extensive rootstock. Stems 1-2 m tall, square in cross section. Leaves opposite and decussate, lance shaped, without petioles, 20-95 mm long and 5-27 mm wide. Leaf bases tend to be rounded or heart-shaped. Flowers in a branched terminal inflorescence, deep pink, showy; occurring Dec-Feb. Seed capsule blackish, 3-5 mm long. Plants are not self-fertile, so seed is only formed where more than one genotype is present.

SIMILAR TAXA
Lythrum virgatum is occasionally cultivated and has a similar growth habit, but smaller in all parts. It is also glabrous and has narrower leaves.

DISTRIBUTION
Locally naturalised, especially in Horowhenua and Canterbury.

HABITAT
Lake margins and other wetlands.

GENUS
Lythrum

FAMILY
Lythraceae

AUTHORITY
Lythrum salicaria L.

FLOWERING
December, January, February

FRUITING
Autumn

YEAR NATURALISED
1958

ORIGIN
Native to Europe, Asia and Australia.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental pond and garden plant

TOLERANCES
A wide tolerance of varying physical and chemical conditions (characteristic of disturbed habitats) e.g. tolerates P and N deficiencies by increasing root to shoot ratio; copes with rising water levels by growth in submerged stems; tolerates trampling, cutting, crushing of stems by growing shoot and root buds at the site of damage; adjusts to decrease in light level with changes in leaf morphology. Seeds can germinate in a pH range 4.0-9.1.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES
Notify regional council if found

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seed or vegetative fragments. Water dispersed, also deliberate planting. Seeds viable for up to 3 years; 2.5 million seeds can be produced per plant.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACW: Facultative Wetland
Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES
This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the MPI website.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)
This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

ATTRIBUTION
Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA). Tolerance description from Thompson et al., 1987.

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lythrum-salicaria/

PDF DATE
08 June 2026