

Pretty - Pretty *Nasty!*

The warm sun and a cool SW breeze made working in my garden a pleasure. With the hydrangeas, daylilies, and roses now in bloom, things were looking pretty darn good, and I was feeling rather proud of my work. Just then Anne appeared around the corner of the house carrying an armful of purple flowers. "Hello" she called. Look at these beautiful flowers I found across the road".

"Yikes!! No! Do you know what you have there?!" I screamed, making an X sign with my two pointer fingers.

Anne looked offended, obviously not realizing what she was carrying. "What's wrong? Is this an endangered species or something?"

"Anne, what you had there was Purple Loosestrife. Pretty, but *nasty*."

"*Nasty, in what way?!*" She sputtered, dropping the loosestrife to the ground and frantically brushing herself off. "Calm down," I said. "Didn't mean to alarm you - it won't cause you to break out in a rash or anything. It's just that it's a horrible invasive and almost impossible to get rid of once it gets established."

"Sorry. I didn't know. The flowers were just so pretty," she explained. "How'd it get here and what could be so bad about a pretty purple flower?...and mmmm," she sniffed the air, "were you baking this morning?"

"Oh, I have a berry pie in the oven. Must be done." I know Anne well. So I knew what to say next. "Come on, let's go sit on the porch and have a piece." Another teachable moment! I couldn't resist and I thought I'd keep her attention with the pie so once we got ourselves served up, I continued.

"Well, purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is an invasive, non-native plant species, introduced from Holland as an ornamental plant in the early 1800s. You can see it growing everywhere, especially in wetlands and low marshy areas with moist, saturated soils.

The plants grow from 4-10 feet and may have up to 30 stems, with profuse clusters of magenta/ purplish flowers blooming from June through September. *Each stem is capable of producing 2-3 million seeds* which are dispersed as wind-borne or transported aquatically. However, even more pernicious is the fact that the plants also form elongated rootstock, which can propagate vegetatively. There are reported instances where eradication by fire, hand-pulling, herbicide application and biological containment appeared to eradicate them for a season only for the plants to re-emerge as before.

It's a hearty plant and once it gets established, it takes over creating a mono-culture and forces out the native species. For instance, certain types of endangered orchids are easily crowded out. Losing native wetland plants to a solid stand of Loosestrife is not

desirable for wildlife, particularly waterfowl, not to mention that the reduction of a variety of pollen producing plants is a loss to bees and in particular honey bees.

And Anne, you should know that even if you see a so-called "Guaranteed Sterile" cultivar at the nursery, it's been proven that these are capable of cross-fertilizing with stock in the 'wild'."

"Alright I get it. Then why don't we dig it out of our wetlands and get it out of there?"

"Well, as I said it's not so easy. There are experiments using biological controls such as weevils, but it's still experimental. The Commission had luck removing it in the Forest Beach marsh when it was just a couple of plants - and of course this required an Order of Conditions under state and local wetlands - " Anne interrupted, "that was excellent pie as usual - I guess I'll stick to getting flowers from your garden from now on." Anne had had enough pie and enough conversation. She trotted off with a few of my hydrangea blooms in her arms.

For more information on invasive species contact the conservation office or visit:
www.IPANE.org ; www.massaudubon.org/Invasive_Species/index.php