

Kildeer Countryside Virtual Wetlands Preserve

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Competition with Purple Loosestrife



A stand of Purple Loosestrife alongside the road. Look closely and you can see some cattails in amongst the intruding Purple Loosestrife.

Even plants like cattails have to compete for sunlight, water, and living space with other plants. One of the cattail's sworn enemies is an alien (introduced from some other place) European intruder, the Purple Loosestrife plant. Purple Loosestrife first arrived in North America from Europe about 150 years ago as a decorative plant for landscaping. However, because of its rapid growth and abundant flowering, the weed has become an environmental menace.

According to Rob Wiedenmann who works for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, this is "pretty much an opportunistic weed. It develops into really dense stands and crowds out native vegetation."

Students, the Illinois Department, and workers from the Forest Preserve are helping in the fight by raising and releasing beetles native to Europe that feed almost exclusively on Loosestrife. They chew the leaves, lay eggs on the stalks, and the hatching larvae feed on the flowering stem, controlling the plant's growth and reproduction. This is GOOD NEWS for cattails, because this noxious weed has been crowding out cattails in Lake County since about 1988.

Great Horned Owl Biologists are eager to use the natural control of beetles instead of herbicides. The first beetles were released in North America in 1994, and 110,000 beetles were released in Lake County in 1997.

Nature Center Students from Lakeview High School in Chicago and Palatine High in Cook County helped raise the beetles and released them in June, 1998.

Raccoon Hollow

Watch Tower



To the left is pictured Purple Loosestrife as grown in a garden. To the right, is pictured a close-up of the actual flower. At the bottom is pictured Purple Loosestrife as it gains a foothold alongside the roadway.



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Written and Compiled by Mrs. Stueckemann and Dr. Marszalek

References:

A listing of references for the Cattails section is located at **[Cattails References](#)**

Credits:

Pictures courtesy of Andrea Bauman, Invading Species Technologist, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Website: www.invadingspecies.com

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