

Purple Loosestrife Biocontrol

- Description:** Play a quick game to learn how Purple Loosestrife affects native species, and how to help.
- Purpose:** To educate about the highly invasive Purple Loosestrife, and what they can do to help control it.
- Time:** 5-10 minutes
- Age/Grade Level:** Everyone

Suggestions: Copy the Contact Info Cards before teaching; at least one per family. If you have more space, allow the Purple Loosestrife plant peoples to walk around to tag each other, but not the grasses and forbs.

Materials:

- Purple Loosestrife Picture (On back of instruction sheet.)
- Contact Info Cards
- *The Facts on Purple Loosestrife –A Major Threat To Wisconsin’s Wetlands And Waterways* pamphlet

What to Do:

1. Introduce: Ask “Who/Does anyone know what an invasive species is?” *An invasive species is “an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.”* (Executive Order 13112) Discuss. In this activity, we will learn about an invasive marshland plant called Purple Loosestrife (PL), and why it is a bad plant, despite its beauty.

2. Do: Have everyone stand up. Explain that they will become either grasses or forbs. Forbs are plants like clover, alfalfa, and dandelions. For those that wish to be grass, raise arms above their head, like blades of grass. Those wanting to be forbs should put their hands on their shoulders, like leaves. The facilitator is the first PL and explains that they, an invading Purple Loosestrife plant, is introduced into the area. The one Purple Loosestrife plant multiplies and sends its seeds out by tagging nearby grasses and forbs, and thus turns that grass or forb turns into another PL plant that also continues to make (tag) more PL plants. Once everyone is a Purple Loosestrife plant, have the group sit down.

3. Think: Ask the group the following questions and discuss with them.

“What just happened?” (All the wetland grasses and forbs turned into a Purple Loosestrife pasture!)

Explain that in a wetland area, Purple Loosestrife replaces native plants. Native wetland animals don’t like to eat PL, so when their habitat is full of PL, that leaves no food for our native animals.

“What is going to happen then?” (The animals die or have to leave.)

The BAD news is: pretty Purple Loosestrife is a villain. The GOOD news is: We can help.

Scientists found non-native beetles that do eat Purple Loosestrife! (The beetles do not eat other plants, so we don’t have to worry about them taking over, either.) We can raise the beetles to release them into PL infested areas. In the spring, *Galerucella* beetle growers first raise PL plants so the baby beetles can grow and increase. Later, thousands of beetles are added to Purple Loosestrife infested sites around the county.

Propagating beetles at home –to protect local wetlands- is easy, inexpensive, and fun! Free equipment (pots, pools, nets, etc.) are offered by WDNR Purple Loosestrife Program Biocontrol Program and the Washington County Shooting Sports Program! Here are some Contact Info Cards! (One per family.)

Developed By: Micah Stege, St. Lawrence Eager Beavers 4-H Club, September 2017

Sources: *Purple Loosestrife –A Major Threat to Wisconsin’s Wetlands and Waterways*, DNR-PUB-WI-799-2007, <https://cleanwater.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/add.purple.pdf> ; *The Facts On Purple Loosestrife -A Major Threat to Wisconsin’s Wetlands and Waterways*, PUB-WT-829 2006; Executive Order 13112.

