

Technical Report



Wetland Flora

No. 00-1 / January 2000

Gene Silberhorn

Water Willow

Swamp Loosestrife

Decodon verticillatus (L.) Ell.

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

This shrub-like herb commonly forms thickets in standing water of marshes or swamps or in tidal freshwater wetlands. Young, pubescent, above water branches are herbaceous (nonwoody), whereas the older submerged portion of the same branch is woody with stringy brown bark. Leaves are opposite or whorled (3 or more leaves emerging from a stem node), lance-shaped with soft pink or magenta flowers projecting from leaf axils. The five petals (rarely 6) are distinctively crinkled or crepe-like. As it grows, the stem forms a characteristic arch, which in many cases, allows the stem tip to become submerged, where it often roots. Stems are usually over 6 feet (2m) long at maturity. Globose, brown capsules are obvious in the fall. Loosestrife thickets are nearly impenetrable to canoeists or boaters. This plant is not one of the true willows (*Salix*), which often grow in wetland habitats. True willows are woody trees or shrubs that usually have narrower, alternate leaves, but do not produce pink flowers. This species should also not be confused with purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) a troublesome introduced weed of wetlands.

Distribution

Decodon verticillatus is found throughout most of eastern United States and southern Canada to Florida and Texas. In Virginia and North Carolina, it is mostly a coastal plain species.

Habitat

Swamp loosestrife occurs in flooded wetlands such as shallow ponds, lakes margins, swamps, sluggish flowing rivers and occasionally in tidal freshwater wetlands. It is often associated with floating leaved plants like spatterdock (*Nuphar luteum*) or waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata*).

Ecological Value / Benefits

The stems of dense stands of this plant provide cover and attachment points for aquatic insects and masses of frog eggs.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Draft Revision of the National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Decodon verticillatus* is classified as an **obligate wetland plant (OBL)**. OBLs are plants that almost always occur in wetlands (> 99% probability).

Decodon verticillatus (L.) Ell. -----



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This report was funded, in part, by the Department of
Environmental Quality's Coastal Resources Management
Program through Grant No. NA67OZ0360-01 of the
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,
Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management,
under the Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.



Illustration by
Kent Forrest

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