
Wildflower Spot – September 2014
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

SWAMP LOOSESTRIFE

Decodon verticillatus

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This is a somewhat shrubby perennial, with long stems that can form an arch, allowing the tip to become submerged. Colonies of new plants often form where the stem tips touch moist ground. The leaves are lance-shaped and opposite on the stem or in whorls of 3 or 4. Bell-shaped pink-purple flowers cluster in the leaf axils, the most prominent feature being the 5 long protruding stamens. Each flower also has 5 short stamens, surrounded by 5 petals. Also known as Water Willow, this species is not a true willow, which are woody shrubs or trees that do not produce pink flowers.

Swamp Loosestrife grows in Virginia only in the coastal counties, in standing water of marshes or swamps or in tidal freshwater wetlands. It is common in the Coastal Plain and rare in the mountain regions. The plant is in bloom from July through September, followed by ¼-inch round seeds. The range is along the coast from Maine to Florida, Louisiana and to Indiana and Missouri.

The lower stems are swollen and spongy in texture, and attractive to muskrats. Ducks eat the seed capsules which probably float on the



water. Many insects such as honeybees, bumblebees, and Swallowtail butterflies cross-pollinate the plants as they feed on nectar from the flowers. Caterpillars of moths and butterflies eat the foliage.

The genus name *Decodon* comes from the Greek *deca*, “ten,” and *odous*, “tooth,” referring to the jagged appearance of the flower parts. ❖

Photo: Swamp Loosestrife (*Decodon verticillatus*) taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.