Saltcedar

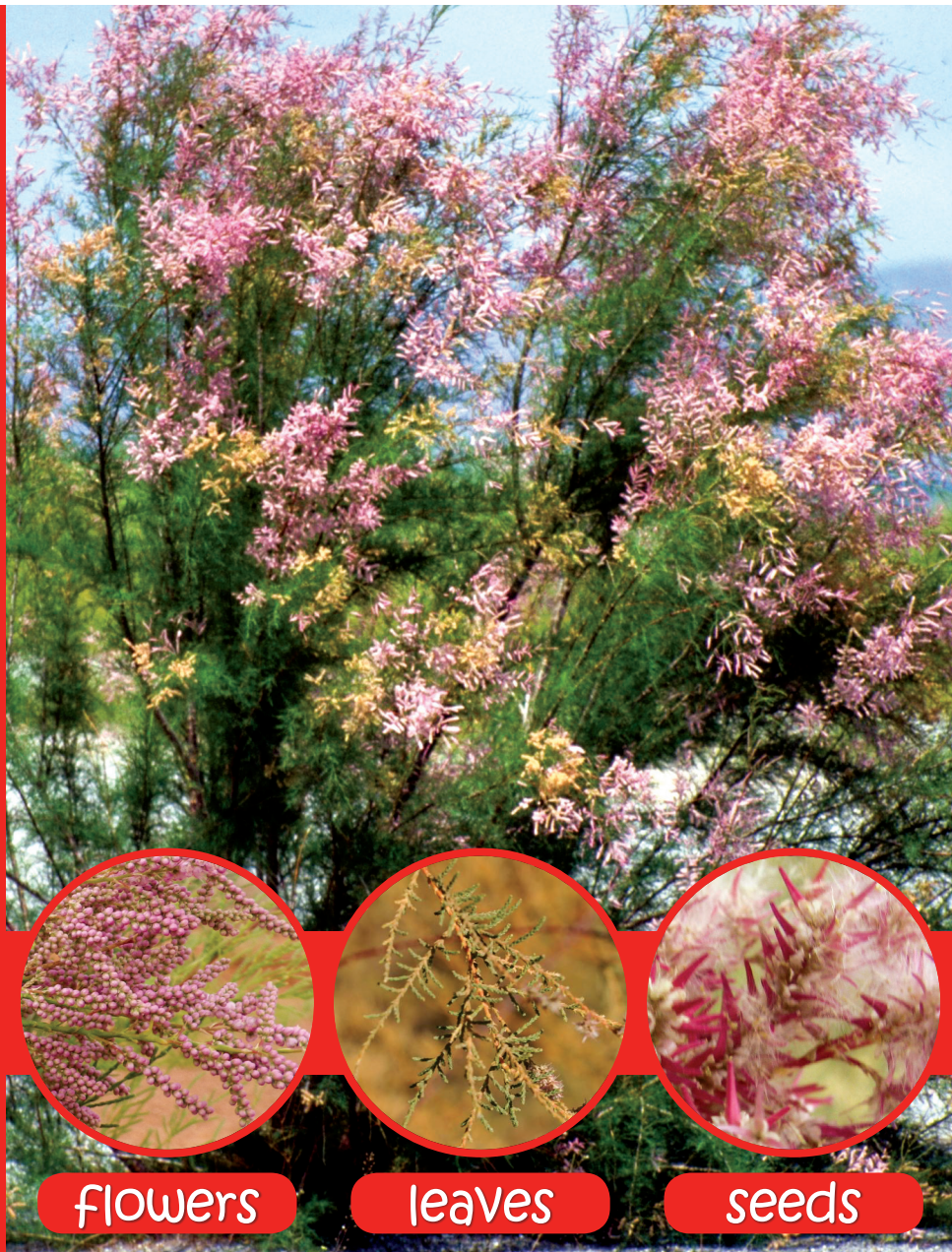**flowers**   **leaves**   **seeds**

Saltcedar

Genus: Tamarix
Species: ramosissima
and T. chinensis
Priority Listing: 2B
Perennial

Saltcedar was introduced to North America from Eurasia and Africa as an ornamental shrub and served as a wind break in the 1800s. During the Great Depression, millions of saltcedar plants were planted on the Great Plains to help combat soil loss through erosion.

Saltcedar is often referred to as tamarisk; which is Latin and references the Tamaris River in Spain where the plant was known to grow.

Saltcedar is recognized by slender branches and gray-green foliage that resembles juniper (or cedar). New growth on branches is smooth, reddish-brown in color, turns a bluish-purple and becomes ridged as the plant ages.

This plant has a deep taproot, can tolerate alkali soils and thrives in soils with a high saline content. The leaves are often encrusted with salt secretions and if you were to taste them, they would taste salty.

Saltcedar blooms from March to September; flowers are pink to white, have five petals and bloom in dense clusters on 2" spikes at the end of branches. When pollinated, each spike can produce up to 600,000 small seeds that are held in a capsule within a fruit that has a small tuft of hairs on the tip to aid in spreading the seed. In addition to seeds, reproduction occurs through stems that are located below the soil.

Throughout Montana, saltcedar can be found along stream banks, reservoir shores and other areas where there is water. Young plants need to be exposed to moist soil for long periods of time to ensure survival. Saltcedar outcompetes native shrubs and trees because it establishes dense mats of seedlings on areas that have recently been flooded.

Photo courtesy of Bonnie Million, NPS, Bugwood.org

Alkali: alkali or alkaline soils are clay soils with high pH (> 8.5) and a poor soil structure
Ornamental: a plant that serves a purpose for ornament, or is grown for show

Perennial: a plant whose life spans several years
Taproot: a main single root of a plant, generally growing straight down