

Grounds and Landscaping

Garden Highlights - September



Symphyotrichum novae-angliae 'Purple Dome'

Purple Dome aster

Asteraceae - the aster family

Native to Central and Eastern US

Splash of color! That's the effect of asters in the fall. Through much of the spring and summer, they are nondescript, low growing perennials until they burst into bloom in early autumn. Some species can reach up to four feet tall when they are in bloom.

On our campus, we have several different species of aster, the most prominent being the smooth blue aster. Our native aster, Symphyotrichum subspicatum, Douglas aster, can be aggressive, spreading by rhizomes and by seed so be careful if you decide to include it in your native plant garden. You can see examples of it in the Ethnobotanical Garden.

If you're admiring a stand of asters on a sunny day, you'll probably notice a lot of insect activity around the area. The honey bees and many of our native pollinators flock to these members of the aster family, favored for their many small floral nectaries and sunray-like petals. They provide a good source of nectar and protein-rich pollen in the fall when these insects are loading up on resources to get through the winter. Most types of aster foliage are food for the larva of many species of Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies), so it's a high value wildlife habitat plant.

