

Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

OCTOBER 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Symphyotrichum oblongifolium Aromatic Aster

Sunny border perfection

Aromatic Aster in full bloom is a stunning purple mound, typically buzzing with bees and late season butterflies this time of year. Considered a wet prairie plant it does need some moisture upon planting, but can withstand drought once established. The non-invasive stems are woody and the plant tends to radiate from the crown. This plant averages about 2 feet in height, and can be used as a ground cover. The leaves are fragrant when crushed. The cultivars 'Raydon's Favorite' and 'October Skies' are

recommended due to their excellent garden behavior. Companion plants include Mountain Mint, Penstemon, Butterfly Weed, Sundrops and Goldenrod.

The fabulous Aster family

Instead of Chrysanthemums, try Aromatic Aster. This reliable fall blooming perennial is an excellent source of late season nectar for bees and butterflies. As the plant grows into a large mature clump it will be covered with purple to lavender blooms each fall. And lucky for you, the same show will happen next year too!

There are over 600 species of American Asters. The genus Aster is so fabulous, many were imported to England over 250 years ago. In 2007, the Asters

were separated into several new genera based on botanical differences. As you shop for them you may still find them listed as

Asters, or as is the case with Aromatic Aster, the new botanical genus, *Symphyotrichum*.

This broad grouping includes New York Aster, Georgia Aster, Climbing Aster, White Wood Aster and Blue Wood Aster to name only a few outstanding garden favorites.

Call it a caterpillar garden

Doug Tallamy reports that over 100 caterpillars feast on *Symphyotrichum* including Crescent and Painted Lady larvae. Consider leaving seed heads for the pleasure of cardinals, finches, nuthatches, titmice and many more overwintering birds for food. It becomes easy to clean up the border in late February when the stems are brittle and can be easily snapped off and buried in the compost pile.

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