

November 2013 Plant of the Month



Blue Woodland Aster

Symphotrichum cordifolium (L.) G.L. Nesom

November's *Plant of the Month* is species that should be familiar to most of our northern county botanists. Blue woodland aster is a wide spread in the Piedmont, Highlands and Valley and Ridge regions. The plant is a perennial herb found on soils rich upland soils that support mesic forest. It has been described in all northern New Jersey Counties and it has historic occurrences in the southern Inner Coastal Plain. Today it is spreading from native gardens and can be found in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester Counties, outside of the xeric Pineland habitats. It is an upland plant that is one of our last plants to bloom. Blue woodland aster is a harbinger of the onset of cold weather, producing its light blue clusters in late August that start blooming in October. It will continue to bloom well into late November until the persistent frosts eventually kill the above ground stems and flowers.

Symphotrichum cordifolium is a member of the Asteraceae and is a member to one of the largest group of North American asters. Modern taxonomic status and current nomenclature separates this group from the former Aster genus due to a number of technical criteria. This species is distinguished from other similar blue flower asters by its heart-shaped long stemmed leaves and small few ray flower clusters. The disk flowers are distinctly reddened and erect.

The season for showy flowering plants is about to pass and now is the time to make one last field trip to see our late flowering species such as the blue woodland aster.