

July 2014 Plant of the Month



Sericocarpus linifolius (L.) Britton, Sterns & Poggenb., Narrow leaf white top aster

The July plant of the month is the one of our early flowering composites, narrow leaf white top aster. This plant has been through the nomenclatural mill changing from *Sericocarpus* to *Aster* and back again. Long called *Sericocarpus* by Fernald (1950) and others, the name was changed to *Aster*. This allowed the authors to alter the specific name as well, calling it *Aster solidagineus*. Happily for those of us that learned it as the genus *Sericocarpus*, it has been returned to the old name due to a number of distinguishing features not least of which is its early flowering. This species and its close relative *Sericocarpus asteroids*, they begin to flower in mid to late June, culminating their flowering period in mid July, a couple of months earlier than the most of the members of the old genus *Aster*. The plant also has a ragged look to the ray flowers. Rather than a full complement of ray flowers, each composite head supports about 5, scattered around the disk flowers. A distinguishing feature between *S. linifolius* and *S. asteroids* is the leaf width. *Sericocarpus linifolius* has very narrow, linear leaves, whereas *S. asteroids* have broad, short wedge-shaped leaves with a weakly toothed margin. Both species prefer open, dry sandy soils.

New Jersey's population is found throughout the southern counties, extending onto the Piedmont where suitable sandy conditions exist. With so many wild plants, make sure you get to see this little native composite before the season passes and the plant progresses to its seasonal finale.

JRA 7.2014