

September 2016 Plant of the Month



Pityopsis falcata (Pursh) Nutt., Sick-leaf Golden Aster

Plant of the Month for September is a native fall flowering composite whose New Jersey distribution is confined to the Pine Barrens. The sickle leaf golden aster has been placed in a number of genera since its discovery. Most recently it was classified as a member of the genus *Chrysopsis*. The plants have synonyms in *Heterotheca* and *Inula*. Modern taxonomists changed these classifications and now place the plant in the genus *Pityopsis*. It was first named *Inula falcata* Pursh in 1814. The type specimen was collected 1836 by Torrey in New Jersey, and the nomenclature for the genus *Pityopsis* is from an 1841 publication.

Sickle leaf golden aster's new common name is sickle-leaf silk-grass, which is so far from its actual classification (it's not a *grass*) that here at Flora of New Jersey we do not apply this misplaced moniker. *Pityopsis* is not common (State Rank S3), but the plant distribution is predictable based on its preferred habitat. The perennial plant occupies open, sunny habitats on xeric sands. This description is commonly found on dry roadsides and open forest gaps in our upland pine-oak woodlands. Extant colonies can be seen in Burlington and Ocean Counties, and herbaria records exist for Atlantic and Monmouth Counties as well.

There are no records of the plant's use by Eastern Native Americans, yet its close relative, *Pityopsis graminifolia* had use to aid oral sores. It was also a medication used for colds and fevers.

Sickle-leaf Golden Aster is now in full flower, and it can be seen on road edges around Harrisville Lake and points east. Be sure to watch the road edges for a small yellow herb when you traverse to Barrens on your fall botanical forays.

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