

December 2019 Plant of the Month



Eurybia spectabilis (Aiton) G.L. Nesom, Eastern Showy Aster

December 2019's **Plant of the Month** is a beautiful perennial: *Eurybia spectabilis*, the showy aster. This plant is another of the many New Jersey's fall flowering composite species. This aster is found throughout the Coastal Plain, and in the sandy areas of the southern Piedmont in Middlesex and Morris County (Mary Hough, 1983). The USDA Plants Database maps show the aster in Somerset County. The same USDA information maps the species throughout the eastern Coastal Plain from Alabama to Massachusetts.

Eurybia spectabilis was formerly *Aster spectabilis*. The modern taxonomic work re-identified the genus *Aster*, creating many new genera from the former tribes. That scholarly work placed our *Plant of the Month* in the genus *Eurybia*. Show aster is one of our common roadside, small blue upland asters that include *Eurybia compacta* (*Aster gracilis*); *Symphotrichum patens* (*Aster patens*), and *Ionactis linariifolius* (*Aster linariifolius*). It is often found in association with other upland species such as warm season grasses, thorough-worts, and goldenrod adapted to dry road sides, and dry upland forest edges. The plant is restricted to acidic habitats where the surface soils have a fine sand texture and a dry environment.

Native Americans used members of the genus as a medicine. No records exist specifically for this species, yet other asters collected in dry habitats were used for a variety of medicinal purposes. The leaves of a few species were collected to attract deer, either as a cover smoke or as a hunting charm. The plant has long succumbed to the season's frosts, so anyone interested should be prepared to search our dry sandy roadsides from August to October.

JRA, 11/2019