



Newsletter

WISCONSIN MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

Fabulous Fall Asters

— Dr. Leonard Perry, Horticulture Professor, University of Vermont

There are many reasons to use fall-blooming asters in landscapes. There is much variety in this large group of hardy perennials, coming in various heights and showy flower colors. You'll find selections in all shades of red, pink, purple, white, and even blue. They're easy to grow, most are native, and they're one of the main plants for bees, butterflies and other pollinators in the fall. They combine well with ornamental grasses, rudbeckia, and coneflowers.

With so many to choose from, how does one begin? In addition to favorite colors, look for ones that best fit your growing conditions, desired habits, and disease resistance.

The starburst appearance of the flowers leads to the name "aster", from the Greek word for star. Asters give their name to the large composite family—Asteraceae—that of sunflowers, dahlias, daisies, zinnias, and similar flowers. The asters all used to be grouped together into one "genus" (*Aster*), but thanks to recent botanical research they've been regrouped with names more suited to botanists than gardeners. So for instance, although the New England aster genus is now changed (*Symphotrichum*), the species name has remained the same (*novae-angliae*).

Generally, most asters prefer moist, well-drained soil and full sun. There is a range of species, however, that can be grouped by their native environments and corresponding garden preferences. The first group prefers rich, moist soil in full sun. These include the species native to meadows, prairies

and marshes such as the New York (*S. novi-belgii*), New England (*S. novae-angliae*), and flat-topped (*D. umbellata*) asters. They prefer steady moisture. Ones that prefer moist soil, but can tolerate dry sites, include the sky-blue (*S. oolentangiense*), heath (*S. ericoides*), calico (*S. lateriflorum*), aromatic (*S. oblongifolium*), and silky (*S. sericeum*) asters. Tatarian aster (*A. tataricus*) in this group, a Siberian native, is quite adaptable to various soils.

The second group of asters also prefer full sun, along with cool nights, and very well-drained soil. This is because they are native to seashores and mountains where soil drainage is excellent. They may be short-lived over only a few years, particularly if conditions aren't just right. In this group you'll find the European Michaelmas daisy native to Asia Minor (*A. amellus*)—a name often given to many asters as they bloom around this Christian

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Asters

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holiday of September 29. Others in this group are the Frikart's (*A. xfrikartii*) aster, of garden origin, and East Indies (*A. tongolensis*) aster native to western China and India.

The third group of native aster species tolerate shade (under 4 hours direct sun per day), but bloom better in part shade (4-8 hours of direct sun). The blue wood aster (*S. cordifolium*), Drummond's aster (*S. drummondii*), white wood aster (*E. divaricata*), and big leaf aster (*A. macrophyllus*) are in this group. Although they prefer moist soils rich in organic matter, they will tolerate some drought.

In perennial trials at the Chicago Botanic Gardens (www.chicagobotanic.org/downloads/planteval_notes/no36_asters.pdf), 119 asters were evaluated over six years. They were rated based on flowering, health, habit, and hardiness. In this USDA zone 5 site (-10 to -20F average winter minimum), seven asters stood out with five-star ratings. These top asters included 'Jin Dai' tatarian aster, white wood aster and its cultivar (cultivated variety) 'Eastern Star', 'Snow Flurry' heath aster, calico aster and its cultivar 'Lady in Black', and 'Raydon's Favorite' aromatic aster. For a rock garden or low wall, where cascading stems are desired, 'Snow Flurry' would be a good choice. For perennial gardens and naturalistic landscape masses, good choices would include asters with bushy habits—'Jin Dai', 'Lady in Black', or 'Raydon's Favorite'.

In addition, there were 19 asters that rated good, with four stars. These good asters included a couple of New England asters—the rosy pink 'Harrington's Pink'

and deep pink 'Honeysong Pink', and three New York asters—the light lavender 'Blaubox', lavender-blue 'Climax', and purple-pink 'Rosenwichtel'. Most selections you may find of the asters are in the New York and New England species. Perhaps the reasons that more didn't rate more highly relate to habit and potential problems. Aromatic asters tend to be less problem-prone, and good alternative choices.

New England asters can get to four to five feet tall and fall over under some conditions, particularly low light. Cutting them back in early summer by one third to one half will make them more bushy, with no need to stake.

One of the more recent introductions of New England asters, and one of the most popular asters, 'Purple Dome' came from the Mt. Cuba Center and gardens in Delaware. It is violet-purple and low, only growing to about 16 inches high and about 2 feet wide. This makes it a good choice for fronts of borders, along walks, massed, or even containers. It bloomed over two months in Chicago, from early September to early November. 'Vibrant Dome' is a bright pink sport of this compact cultivar, not in these trials but popular and available.

'Purple Dome' is a good example of how resistance to diseases can vary by site. Often considered to have excellent resistance to powdery mildew, in the Chicago trials this cultivar was only rated as fair.

Asters may get rust or powdery mildew diseases on leaves. The

former was seen more on the New York asters in the Chicago trials, while the latter disease was seen more on the New England asters. Giving good air circulation around plants, and disposing of leaves in the fall (not in the compost bin) will help lessen these. There are several sprays, organic and synthetic, that can be used for these too.

A main destructive insect of asters may be the lacebug, a small grayish insect that appears in midsummer and sucks the plant juices from the undersides of leaves, primarily of the New York and related types. Leaves turn yellowish and eventually brown and fall off. Organic or synthetic insect sprays can be used for control. Read and follow all label directions for best control, and safety for you and the environment.

Deer and rabbits can be quite fond of asters, too. There are repellent sprays for these. Low fencing for rabbits, and deer netting for these may be needed if repellents don't work.

Several asters have been bred as alternatives to fall garden mums, including the lavender 'Ariel', violet 'Celeste', and the purple 'Pixie Dark'. Results from the Chicago trials show these only live a year or two, so should be grown as annual flowers. Since the New York asters have problems, and are short-lived, they are not recommended either, even though commonly found.

Keeping asters healthy during the growing season—in part, growing them under the right conditions—will go a long way toward helping them survive the subsequent winter.



'Purple Dome'

Improving Reference Library, Outreach in Washington Co.

—by Cindy Helt, Washington Co. MGV

Many people are showing a renewed interest in growing and preserving their own food. If a person has no experience, where do they begin to find relevant information? The internet might be an answer. But there is so much misinformation out in cyberspace, how does one gather the best information? The county UW-Extension is a great place for research based information. The MGs of Washington Co. work hard to make this information available to the community. This summer we provided a program presented by a Master Food Preserver that was well attended by the community. Even those of us who have canning experience learned about new products, procedures

and safety precautions. The Washington Co. MGA used some of its \$100 WIMGA grant to increase the reference library of preservation information as a follow-up to the program by purchasing several currently published books.

Because a presence in the community is essential for providing reliable information, the Washington Co. MGA participates in many popular community events. The rest of our grant money was used to purchase a canopy tent with easy assembly to use at these events. We regularly have a booth at the West Bend Farmers Market, with our MG banner attached. Many attendees stop by the booth with questions

about what to grow, when to plant, and what is wrong with this plant? The banner on our tent makes it easy to spot in a very busy market. In addition, it provides shade for folks during conversations. We also use the tent at the County Fair, and recently at the Mother Earth Fair. People say they appreciate seeing our tent where they know they can get quality information.



Fantastic First Driftless Gardeners' Gathering

—by Terry Wood, Grant Co. MGV

On Saturday, April 2, over 70 people gathered for the Grant County MGA's first ever local garden conference. This event was organized in conjunction with Dr. Donita Cartmill of UW-Platteville and the Horticulture club of UW-Platteville, who met throughout the 2015-16 school year with Terry Wood and Judy Soles, MGV coordinators for the event. Our \$250 WIMGA grant was used to cover the expense

of our main speaker, Lee Somerville, author of *Vintage Wisconsin Gardens: A History of Home Gardens*. The event included educational table displays by several MGVs, and Corey Weydert, a graduate of the fall 2015 training, presented a session on *Making Willow Garden Structures*. Ted Bay, Grant Co. UW-Extension Ag Agent and MG advisor, gave a presentation about the UWEX Labs. The Horticulture students

introduced speakers, helped with registrations, acted as greeters and gave guided tours of the UW-Platteville greenhouses. *Three Sister Seed Packets* with historical information and a thank-you were distributed to all attendees. Throughout the event, attendees commented on the fine quality of our sessions. Returned surveys indicate interest in another conference.

St. Feriole Island Memorial Gardens in Prairie du Chien

— Sandy Vold, Crawford County MGV

In the 11 short years since its inception, St. Feriole Island Gardens in Prairie du Chien has become a destination for many types of visitors—walkers, plant lovers, tourists, wedding parties, school groups and people just looking for a place for quiet contemplation. It has also become an example of community pride and cooperation, and it owes its existence, in great part, to a Master Gardener.

For over 300 years, St. Feriole Island was a residential community which, due to the low elevation of much of the island, was subject to periodic spring flooding. Residents took the floods in stride, but then came the disastrous flood of 1965, followed by another big

flood in 1969. The damages were so great that residents were forced to vacate the island, and the vacation was complete by the mid-1980's. For several years after that, the island remained unoccupied except for a few businesses and Villa Louis (a historical museum operated by the Wisconsin Historical Society). The houses were torn down or removed and the former

neighborhood became a sea of grass.

Crawford Co. MGV Cathie Nelson remembers the conversation that started



Sauk County MGVs toured St. Feriole Island Gardens this summer. They are seen here exploring one of the two gazebos and the shade garden beyond it.



A welcome sign greets visitors to the gardens.

things rolling. Her mother had died and left a small inheritance to each of her children, asking that they use it to do something good for the town in which they lived. She mentioned this to a prominent businessman in the city, who said he wanted to do something in memory of his wife, and thus was born the idea for St. Feriole Island Memorial Gardens. From there, a committee, headed by Cathie and her husband Tom, was formed in 2005 and the gardens became a nonprofit organization.

Today, St. Feriole Island Gardens consists of 10 acres

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St. Feriole Gardens

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of annual and perennial plants, trees and shrubs, cozy sitting areas, statuary and other decorative structures. Two gazebos and a pergola are located in the gardens, and more additions are planned. A Harmony Garden, consisting of five different oversized percussion instruments on a round open air stage, is currently under construction, and area artists will soon transform an old and ailing tree into a carved statue. Trees



Artfully placed chairs and benches throughout the gardens invite visitors to sit, relax and enjoy the view.

have been planted in memory of well-known people who lived in or visited Prairie du Chien, including the poet Joyce Kilmer, author and playwright Ben Logan, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau and others. Other trees have been planted in memory of deceased loved ones, and a Trail of Trees represents each of the United States Presidents who have visited Prairie du Chien.

All of this has come about through the generous donations of area businesses and individuals, residents who have purchased plants or trees in memory of loved ones, and the hard work of countless volunteers,

who have planted and tended



A large hollow log, a child-size pergola perfect for a tea party, and an old wooden boat filled with sand and toys assure that visiting children will enjoy the gardens.

garden beds, mowed lawns, contributed plants for an annual plant sale, and helped out at other events. At the suggestion of the organization's first president,

Because of their beauty, the gardens have become a setting for weddings, receptions, picnics, tours and other activities. Oktoberfest is celebrated in the gardens the third Saturday of October. German food and drink, a parade, music, and games entice whole families to come and enjoy themselves. MGVs sponsor a scarecrow contest and set up garden-related craft activities for the children.



The overall view of the gardens is peaceful, but some stunning plant combinations attract attention as well.

Become a WIMGA Board Member!

Are you interested in becoming more involved in the MG program beyond your own local association and helping MGVs throughout the state?

Elections are held every year to select one Wisconsin MGV to serve a 3 year term as an At-Large Director on the WIMGA Board (3 of the

15 Directors are At-Large; the remaining 12 are selected from the Local Reps in each of the 6 Districts). The At-Large Directors represent all MGVs in the state (not just those of their own association). They are expected to attend 5 in-person Board meetings at a central location in the state and serve

on WIMGA committees.

The Board is now soliciting nominations for this position. Only certified MGVs are eligible. Nominees must submit a short bio (preferably by email) to Susan Mahr by December 7 to be included on the ballot that will be published in the January newsletter.

WIMGA Educational Grants Due October 1

The WIMGA awards small grants annually to MG Associations to aid their efforts in community education. Over the years MGAs have used this money in a variety of ways to further the educational mission of the MG program. Read about two of the projects that received awards last year on page 3 of this newsletter (one

was included in the July issue). Additional projects will be profiled in subsequent issues.

Applications for each of the 3 levels of funding (\$100, \$250, \$400) are due by October 1 (postmark date). Applications must be submitted by Associations (NOT individual MGVs). The complete rules are posted on the WIMGA

website under Educational Grants (<http://www.wimga.org/educational-grants.html>) and you can download application forms from there.

Mail applications to the WIMGA Treasurer, Byron Hacker (address on page 8) (electronic applications will not be accepted).

mg program

Time to Turn in Your Volunteer Hours!

It's that time of year again — time to turn in your MG volunteer hours record sheet!

The deadline to submit hours to your local recordkeeper is **October 1** (or earlier in some counties). The local person only has a short period of time to collate all of the local records and send that in to the MG Program Office. It is important to keep track of and turn in your volunteer service AND continuing education hours, both to help UW-Extension

show the value and importance of the MG program (essential in this era of budget cuts and scrutiny of government programs) and for your own benefit. Remember that only certified MGVs receive the monthly MG Program Office newsletter, the *Volunteer Vibe*, and other notifications about Level 2 training and other special opportunities. If you didn't do enough to recertify but still intend to be active next year and want to get the *Vibe*, you will

need to complete and submit an exemption request form which you can find on the MG website (wimastergardener.org/files/2016/01/Exemption-request-form.pdf) or from your local UWEX office.

Please turn in all your hours on time (even if you have until next year to complete your initial requirements) so your efforts will count in the annual report and you can be recertified for 2017! Don't be left out!



events

See the MG website for more events and details

September 2016



10

Monarch Butterflies
Spoooner ARS, Spooner, WI
By North Country MGA on their Monarch Waystation, 10-noon. Free. www.northcountrymgv.org.



12

Small Trees with Big Impact
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
Guided walk with Jeff Epping, 5:30-7. \$17. (608) 246-4550.



13

Garbage into Gold
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
MGV Susan Obry about composting, 6:30-8:30. \$15. (608) 246-4550.



14-17

Regional MG Conference
Wisconsin Dells, WI
By the WIMGA instead of annual conference. Tours, workshops, vendors. <https://midwestmgconference.wordpress.com/>



16-18

Rose Society Convention
Pewaukee, WI
Includes a free Rose Show Saturday 1-4. Convention fee \$50+. Diane (414) 414-687-9641



24

End of Season Tea
Fort Atkinson, WI
By Jefferson Co. MGV on garden cleanup, seed saving, etc. At Hoard Museum, 9-12:30. 920-563-7769



28

Bulb Planting
Rotary BG, Janesville, WI
With Hort Director Mark Dwyer, 6:30-8. \$5. (608) 754-1779.

October 2016.....



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Fall Color and Interest
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
With Mark Dwyer, on woodies, perennials and grasses. 6:30-8:30. \$15. (608) 246-4550.



18

Fall Gardening Tasks
Rotary BG, Janesville, WI
With Hort Director Mark Dwyer, 6:30-8. \$5. (608) 754-1779.



22

Shade Gardening
Fort Atkinson, WI
By Jefferson Co. MGV at Hoard Museum, 2-3pm. 920-563-7769.



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What's Bugging Your Tree?
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
Common insects and diseases, and what to do about them, 6:30-8. \$15. (608) 246-4550.

Planning Ahead



Nov 5, 2016

Fall Garden Symposium
Rotary BG, Janesville, WI
Explore the Midwest Garden with 3 speakers, 9-3. MGVs \$65. (608) 754-1779.



Jan 8-17, 2017

MG Tour to Costa Rica
Immerse yourself in the rainforest and other tropical habitats as we learn about tropical flowers, ecological systems, and horticultural production. \$3225 + airfare. \$225 discount if you register by 9/1! Questions, contact Susan Mahr at (608) 265-4504 or Kari at (576) 303-2872 to register.



March 8-19, 2017

Scenery of New Zealand
New Zealand
With Susan Mahr, includes many gardens and natural areas. All details at <http://hiddentreasurestours.com/upcoming-tours/new-zealand/>

Why isn't my event listed?

If it isn't on the MG website, it won't make it into this newsletter. If you know of a horticulture-related event that you would like publicized on the state MG website and possibly in this newsletter, all you have to do is submit the information at:

wimastergardener.org/submit-an-event/

resources

Free Flower ID App

Have you ever encountered a really interesting flower or beautiful plant and wanted to know the name of it? A SEW MGV recommends the free app LikeThatGarden available for Android and iPhone at <https://www.likethatapps.com/LikeThatGarden/>. According to that website, "LikeThatGarden uses JustVisual's patented visual search technology to identify flowers with just a picture! Use your mobile phone camera to take a picture of a flower or



use a photo, and instantly get search results of your search as well as similar looking flowers for inspiration and ideas." But independent reviewers suggest that the app "doesn't so much definitively identify plants as suggest what they might be." It's up to you to sort through the many possibilities to confirm which of the app's suggestions are the one you have. So if you have a good, clear photo of a common plant, the app is likely to get it right. If not, if you have time, the app can at least provide a good start to figuring out what your mystery plant might be. But be cautious about any ID the app provides — it uses crowd sourced data, so photos that match your plant might be incorrectly labeled as the wrong plant — and confirm it with other sources if it's important to have a correct ID.



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September 2016 Newsletter

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The Wisconsin Master Gardener Association Newsletter is published 6 times a year (January, March, May, July, September and November) dedicated to providing horticulture education and information about the Master Gardener program to state association members. The newsletter is compiled and published in the Horticulture Department at the UW - Madison.

Articles, artwork and ideas are welcome, but final selection and editing are the responsibility of the editorial staff. Submissions and comments should be addressed to the WIMGA Newsletter Committee Chair (Lynn Caine, dljed@charter.net).

Visit the WIMGA Website at
<http://www.wimga.org/>