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Plant of the Week

New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae* (L.) G.L. Nesom)

By David Taylor

New England aster is a member of the Asteraceae (Aster or Composite) family. Until recently, it was placed in the genus *Aster*, a then large and complex group. Its name *Symphyotrichum*, means 'united hairs', and *novae-angliae*, 'New England.' The old name *Aster* meant star in reference to the shape of the flower. The 'flower' of this plant actually is made up of an aggregate of about 100-150 individual flowers of two types that form a capitulum or head. The 'petals' are actually each and individual flower called a ray flower. In the center of the head is the other kind of flower, tube flowers, because they are tube-like in appearance.

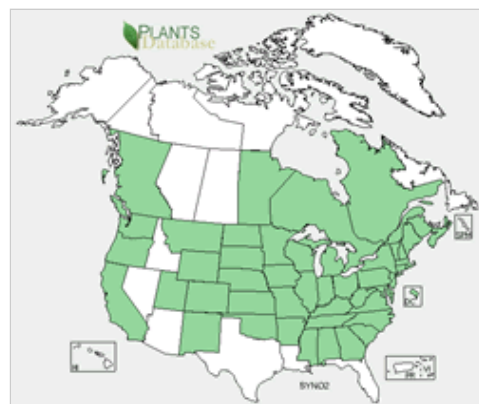
This plant grows up to about 2 meters (6 feet) tall, but is usually 1-1.2 meters (3-4 feet) tall. By the time it is flowering, many of the lower leaves have fallen off, leaving a bare brown stem. Hundreds of heads on a single plant, but 50-100 is typical. Each head is between 19-38 millimeters (0.75-1.5 inches) across. Plants usually consist of 1-3 stems, but large clumps are occasionally encountered. The leaves are somewhat firm and softly hairy, 3-12 centimeters (approximately 1-5 inches) long x 6-20 millimeters (approximately 0.25-0.75 inches) wide.

The species is an open lands plant, thriving in grasslands, old fields, savannas, and woodlands. It is frequently encountered on roadsides and in fencerows. It can also be found at the edge of forest. The species is known from most of the conterminous United States, except a few southern states and a few western states. It is present in much of Canada as well.

This aster is easily cultivated. Many native plant nurseries sell the plants. Numerous commercial nurseries sell cultivars of the species. It does well in native gardens and as accent plants in a formal garden. It can also be grown in a clump with species such as tall goldenrod to provide contrasting colors.

For More Information

- [PLANTS Profile - *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, New England aster](http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=SYNO2) (<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=SYNO2>)
- [Flora of North America: *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*](http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=1&taxon_id=250067662) (http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=1&taxon_id=250067662)



(<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=SYNO2>) *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae* range map. USDA PLANTS Database.



([wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/images/newenglandaster/Symphyotrichum_novae-angliae_Photo1_lg.jpg](#)) New England Aster plant (c) 2002 Steven J. Baskauf (<http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu/contact/baskauf>).



(/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/images/newenglandaster/Symphotrichum_angliae_Photo2_lg.jpg) Close up of capitulum (c) 2002 Steven J. Baskauf (<http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu/contact/baskauf>).



(/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/images/newenglandaster/Symphotrichum_angliae_Photo1A_lg.jpg) Close up of leaves and stem (c) 2002 Steven J. Baskauf (<http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu/contact/baskauf>).

Plant of the Week



(/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/zizania_aquatica.shtml)

Annual Wildrice (*Zizania aquatica* L. or *Zizania palustris* L.)

Plant of the Week Gallery (/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/index.php)

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