

Silky aster (*S. sericeum*)



Plant: Low growing, wiry branched with open flower clusters at the top, 8-24 inches tall.

Flowers: 15-25 rays, long, violet.

Leaves: very soft and silky, silvery-green, without stalks.

Habitat: dry, sunny; prairies.

New England aster (*S. novae-angliae*)



Plant: Tall and vigorous, branching with stiff clusters of rough stems, colony forming, 1-7 feet tall.

Flowers: 45-75 rays, long, one inch, slender, shades of purple.

Leaves: leaf bases have two lobes that clasp the hairy, slightly sticky stem.

Habitat: moist to dry, sunny; prairies.

Prairie flower walk

Each composite flower consists of a central yellow disk surrounded by white, blue, or purple rays (petals). Disks often turn shades of purple after pollination. Take some time to look at the asters of autumn. Observe the differences and similarities.

About Holy Wisdom

In 1953, the Benedictine sisters first set down roots on this hill overlooking Lake Mendota. Since then, they have built a strong tradition of caring for the earth, rooted in the Benedictine values of stability and respect for all creation. Some of the sisters' first projects caring for the earth included planting trees, many of which are still present today.

We welcome you to explore the trails, prairies and woodlands at Holy Wisdom Monastery and hope you enjoy this oasis of quiet beauty. To learn more, please visit HolyWisdomMonastery.org. Friends are also invited to join volunteer work days and attend environmental education events. If you would like to support our work of caring for the earth, please become a Friend of Wisdom Prairie.

Created by Sylvia Marek & Peter Marshall 2025 ©



Holy Wisdom Monastery

*Weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and
care for the earth into a shared way of life*

4200 County Road M, Middleton, WI 53562
HolyWisdomMonastery.org • 608-836-1631

Native Asters of Southern Wisconsin



Silky

New England

Smooth

Sky-blue

Arrow-leaved

Frost

Heath

Calico

Beautiful purple, blue and white asters brighten the autumn landscape. These lovely perennials bloom from late August through October. There are 23 kinds of native asters in Wisconsin (40+ hybrids). They are in the Asteraceae family and the Symphyotrichum genus.

Clues to identification are: color and number of rays (petals), alternate leaves, shape of flower head and leaf shape and texture. Fall asters are an important source of nectar and pollen for many insects. Birds eat seeds in winter.

Smooth aster (*S. laeve*)



Plant: open spreading flower clusters, smooth stem, 2-3 feet tall.

Flowers: 15-25 rays, more than one inch long, pale lavender-blue.

Leaves: smooth leaves, pale green, leaves clasp stems.

Habitat: dry to medium moisture, sunny; prairies.

Sky-blue aster (*S. oolentangiense*)



Plant: open spreading flower clusters, 2-3 feet tall.

Flowers: 13-18 rays, less than one inch long, pale lavender-blue.

Leaves: rough leaves, long, narrow; lower leaves have winged stems.

Habitat: dry to medium moisture, sunny; prairies.

Arrow-leaved aster (*S. urophyllum*)



Plant: tall, abundant conical flower clusters, single stem; 1-4 feet tall.

Flowers: 8-20 rays, short, pale lavender-blue to white.

Leaves: winged stalk on lower leaves with heart shaped base, shallow teeth.

Habitat: dry, shade to sunny; open woodlands and edges.

Frost aster (*S. pilosum*)



Plant: tall, showy, spreading branches, fine white hairs on stem, 1-5 feet tall.

Flowers: 16-30 rays, short, white.

Leaves: upper leaves numerous, short, curved and hairy.

Habitat: dry, sunny; prairies, disturbed sites.

Heath aster (*S. ericoides*)



Plant: short, crowded clusters of tiny flowers, on upper part of plant, colony forming; 6-30 inches tall.

Flowers: 8-20 rays, short, white.

Leaves: stiff, tiny, curved, crowded, stalkless and prickly.

Habitat: dry, sunny; prairies and sand.

Calico aster (*S. lateriflorum*)



Plant: many curving or horizontally spreading branches; 1-4 feet tall.

Flowers: 9-15 rays, short, white or purplish, multi-colored central discs, flowers along sides of branches.

Leaves: pointed at both ends.

Habitat: dry to moist, mostly shade; edge of woods, prairies, disturbed soil.