



ASTER

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Introduction: Stars of the Fall Garden

As summer's perennials fade and the PNW light turns amber, Aster steps into the spotlight. The name comes from the Greek word for 'star', and it's an apt one: each bloom is a small, radiating burst of color, held in clusters so dense that a mature clump can look like it's been dipped in confetti.

Asters belong to the Aster family, *Asteraceae*, and today are split mostly among the genera *Symphyotrichum* and *Eurybia*, following a taxonomic reshuffle that moved most North American species out of the original genus. In the nursery trade, you'll still likely find them identified as "Aster".

What makes them so valuable in a PNW garden is timing. By late September, most summer bloomers have gone to seed. Asters wait to open and have the ability to stretch the color season by 6-8 weeks and to give pollinators one last major nectar source before the cold sets in.



Growing Tips & Care

Asters are forgiving, long-lived perennials once established, but a few habits make the difference between a leggy, floppy clump and a dense mound covered in blooms.

Light & Soil

Full sun produces the most compact growth and heaviest flowering. In the PNW's cooler, often overcast summers, six or more hours of direct sun is worth prioritizing! Aster tolerates a wide range of soils, but performs best in average, well-draining ground amended with compost. Heavy clay that stays wet throughout the winter is the most common cause of crown rot.

Watering Needs

Keep soil evenly moist through the establishment year, especially during our typically dry late-summer stretch. Established plants can tolerate brief dry spells, but bloom best with consistent moisture right up through the flowering period in September and October.

Dividing & Deadheading

Divide every two to three years in early spring as new growth emerges. Aster exhausts the soil at the center of the clump and flower less if left undivided. Deadheading spent blooms isn't strictly necessary, but tidies the plant and can encourage a modest second flush.

In late spring and again in early summer, pinch stems back by 1/3. This delays the bloom time by only about a week or two, but produces a shorter, bushier, self-supporting plant with far more flowering stems - no staking required!



Varieties & Species

The name “Aster” covers a lot of ground. This is a sampling of information about the species and a few of the distinct characteristics of some North American varieties.

Symphyotrichum novi-belgii

New York Aster/Michaelmas Daisy

- The classic nursery Aster!
- Blooms: Dense, double- or single-flowered cultivars in pink, blue, purple and white.
- Habit: Compact, 18-24" in height.
- Best for: Borders and containers.

Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

New England Aster

- Blooms: Fuzzy stems and single daisy-form flowers in rich purples and pinks.
- Habit: 3-4' in height; a taller, more upright species!
- Best for: Cottage gardens, cuttings, and pollinator plantings.

Symphyotrichum ericoides

Heath Aster

- Blooms: Airy, small-flowered species with a cloud of tiny white or pale lavender blooms on wiry, branching stems.
- Habit: 2-3' in height.
- Best for: Soft filler among bolder perennials or grasses and in pollinator gardens, as it is a favorite among small, native bees.

Eurybia divaricata

White Wood Aster

- Blooms: Small, white, star-shaped flowers over heart-shaped leaves.
- Habit: 1-1.5' in height.
- Best for: Part shade gardens as it spreads gently under trees and along woodland edges.

Spotlight: 'Marie III Dark Pink' & 'Peter III Blue'

Planted side by side, Marie III's pink and Peter III's cool lavender-blue create the kind of high-contrast pairing that reads clearly from across the yard. And since they both share the same bloom window, neither one outshines the other for long!



Marie III Dark Pink

Symphyotrichum novi-belgii

Fully double, raspberry-pink blooms in dense clusters over a compact, mounded habit - one of the showiest pinks on the market.

Height/Spread: 16"/24"

Bloom Time: August-October

Sun: Full sun

Hardiness: Zone 5

Best Uses: Borders, containers, cut flowers

Pollinators: Attracts butterflies



Peter III Blue

Symphyotrichum novi-belgii

Lavender-blue, double flowers with a fine, upright-spreading habit and dark green foliage that stays clean all season long.

Height/Spread: 16"/24"

Bloom Time: August-October

Sun: Full sun

Hardiness: Zone 5

Best Uses: Edging, borders, beds

Pollinators: Attracts butterflies

Seasonal Planting Guide

Because Asters are typically sold already in bud or bloom, gardeners may assume they are a one-season-specific plant. However, here in the PNW, our long, mild autumns actually make fall the perfect time to get Asters into the ground so they can rebloom year over year!

Why Fall Works Here

Our first hard frost typically holds off until late October or November, giving fall-planted asters six or more weeks to establish roots in soil that's still warm from summer, while cooler air reduces transplant stress. Plants settle in over winter and emerge already established come spring.

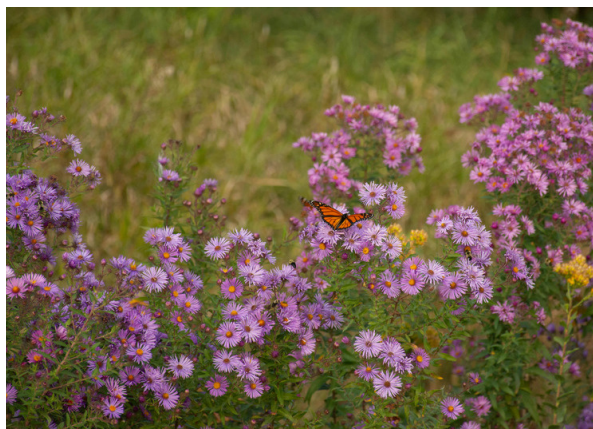
Watch the Water

Late-summer dry spells are common here into September. Newly planted Asters have shallow roots, so make sure to check the soil moisture every few days until fall rains resume in earnest. For established clumps already in the garden, fall is time to simply enjoy the beautiful display! Save dividing for spring, when new growth makes it easy to see and separate healthy crowns.

Window	What to Do
Early September	Shop while plants are in bud or bloom, so you can confirm color and habit. Plant right away or hold in a shaded spot and water daily.
Mid-to-late September	Prime planting window! Water in thoroughly and mulch 2" to moderate soil temperature swings.
October	Still a safe planting window in most PNW gardens; watch the extended forecast for an early frost.
November through spring	Hold new plants in containers over winter rather than planting; resume in-ground planting the following spring.

Design Ideas for the Fall Garden

Aster earns its keep by filling a color gap most gardens have in September and October. But there are still plenty of ways to put them to work!



Drift Planting

Group five or more of a single cultivar in an irregular sweep rather than a tidy row. Asters look best en masse, echoing how they grow wild in meadows.



Grass Companions

Pair with ornamental grasses like Calamagrostis or Andropogon. The grasses' upright, airy texture sets off the dense flower heads and both peak at the same time of the year.



Fall Container Combos

Use compact cultivars as the “filler” in a spiller-thriller-filler container alongside ornamental Kale or Chrysanthemums for an easy, seasonal swap-in.



Cutting Garden Row

Taller species like New England Aster hold up well in a vase. Dedicate a row in the cutting garden and you'll have fresh fall arrangements for weeks.