



Species Spotlight

White Wood Aster

Eurybia divaricata

August 2016

Spring is no doubt the showiest time of year for woodland wildflowers, especially contrasted with the recently departed monochrome blanket of snow. Bloodroot, trout lilies, trillium and many other colorful beauties steal the show. As summer progresses cohosh, jack-in-the-pulpit, and ferns take center stage. It is not until late summer, when most other wildflowers have dropped their petals and are preparing for a long winter under snow and ice, that the wood asters finally get to have their chance. Though there all along, they bide their time until their understated white blooms can take advantage of mature insects for pollination and of cooler temperatures for setting seed.

What is it?

Often mistaken for a daisy, asters are actually members of the sunflower family. Growing 1½-2½ feet tall in filtered sun to full shade, white wood asters have bright white, flat-topped branched flower clusters atop green, somewhat zig-zagged stems that bloom from late summer until mid-fall. Each fragrant flower has a central disc that begins as yellow and ages to a purplish red, consisting of a network of extremely small flowers called flowerets. Heart shaped leaves are found at ground level with smaller ovate leaves occurring higher up on the stems. The plant ranges from southeastern Canada south through most of the eastern United States, and it is most oft found in dry open woods, clearings, roadsides, and on the edges of deciduous forests.

Why is it important?

Flower heads of wood asters provide late-season nectar for bees and butterflies, and the plants themselves can host the caterpillars of the Pearl Crescent and Checkerspot butterflies. In the fall, their seeds help to provide welcome sustenance for both migratory and winter-resident birds. Asters are drought tolerant and somewhat unpalatable to deer and rabbits as well.

How does NETN monitor it?

The white wood aster is one of a special selection of plant and animal species chosen to be monitored as part of the network's volunteer long-term phenology monitoring program. Phenology is the study of recurring plant and animal life cycle events such as leafing-out and flowering, maturation of agricultural plants, emergence of insects, and migration of birds. In 2009, NETN began a partnership with the USA National Phenology Network (USA-NPN) to monitor phenology in northeastern national parks. Regular observation of plant and animal phenology allows for a better understanding of the ecology of an area and the ways plants and animals may be responding to climate change. At each participating NETN park, staff chose species from a recommended list that are of interest and present in accessible

*The Autumn wood the aster knows,
The empty nest, the wind that grieves,
The sunlight breaking thro' the shade,
The squirrel chattering overhead,
The timid rabbits lighter tread
Among the rustling leaves.*

- Dora Read Goodale



locations at each park. Recommended species are generally easy to identify, widely distributed across NETN parks, and ecologically important or of special interest. Chosen species can be a foundation species (dominant primary producers with large influence on the ecosystem, such as trees and shrubs), invasive species, animal pollinated plants and/or their pollinators, or migratory species and/or their key food sources. White wood aster was chosen because of its wide distribution in the eastern U.S., it is easily recognizable, and it is one of the few woodland plants that flowers in late summer/early fall in the area. To learn more about this program, visit NETN's phenology monitoring webpage. You can also learn how you can join the volunteer effort by downloading the phenology monitoring volunteer guide from our website, or by visiting the USA-NPN website.

How is it doing?

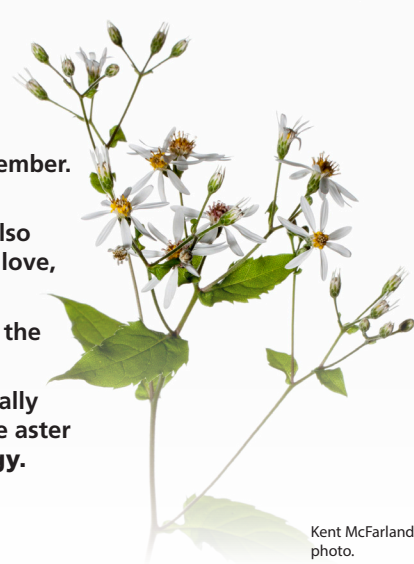
White wood asters are still commonly found in the northeast and appear to be doing well. As with many other species in the area however, things could change over the coming years and decades as the climate continues to inevitably warm and precipitation and average temperatures shift. That is why it is critical to continue to build base-line phenological data for asters as well as other plant and animal species in the area. Consider becoming part of the USA-NPN and try your hand at monitoring asters or any other species of interest to you in your backyard or your nearest national park. The more observations there are, the more complete the picture will be about changes in the phenology of the plants and animals that call the northeast home.

Did You Know? Aster Facts:



- Many of the Latin names of Aster species were changed recently due to DNA and genetic research. White wood aster changed from *Aster divaricatus* to *Eurybia divaricata*.
- In centuries past, asters were often burned and/or smoked to ward off negative energy.
- They have been used to treat headaches, colds and muscle aches.

- Aster is the birth flower for September.
- The aster has been used to mark the passing of a loved one. It is also associated with patience, lasting love, good luck, and feminine energy.
- The word "aster" is derived from the Greek word for "star".
- There is a branch of botany specially dedicated to the sole study of the aster family, known as **synantherology**.



Kent McFarland photo.

Forbs

Directions: Fill in the date and time in the top rows and circle the appropriate letter in the column below.

y (phenophase is occurring); n (phenophase is not occurring); ? (not certain if the phenophase is occurring).

Do not circle anything if you did not check for the phenophase. In the adjacent blank, write in the appropriate measure of intensity or abundance for this phenophase.



Species: Eurybia divaricata

Common Name: white wood aster

Nickname: white wood aster-1

Site: MABI CitSci White Wood Aster p

Year: 2016

Observer: H. D. Thoreau

Do you see...	Date: <u>8/23</u> Time: <u>7:35</u>	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Initial growth	<u>y</u> n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Leaves	<u>y</u> n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Flowers or flower buds	<u>y</u> n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Open flowers	<u>y</u> n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Fruits	y <u>n</u> ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Ripe fruits	y <u>n</u> ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Recent fruit or seed drop	y <u>n</u> ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?	y n ?
Check when data entered online:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments:	<u>I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately.</u>							

Sample observation sheet for white wood aster. The information asked for on data sheets is straightforward, and people from any background and age group can become a volunteer observer. There are also **Species Profiles** available on the USA-NPN website that specifically state what to look for on each plant and how to identify key features. Observers have the option of downloading and printing off data sheets, or installing the USA-NPN Nature's Notebook app on their smartphone to make observations directly in the field.

Species Profile page for White Wood Aster on the USA-NPN website.

For more information

NETN website

<http://go.nps.gov/phenology>

To sign up for an USA-NPN account:

USA-NPN website

<https://www.usanpn.org/>

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MY OBSERVATION DECK

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NN Home » Plants And Animals » *Eurybia divaricata*

Photo Credit: © Me via Wikimedia Commons

Eurybia divaricata

white wood aster

Where is this species found?

States & Provinces:
AL, CT, DC, DE, GA, KY, MA, MD, ME, MS, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, ON, PA, QC, RI, SC, TN, VA, VT, WV



[click to enlarge](#)

Which phenophases should I observe?



www.facebook.com/nps.netn

<http://go.nps.gov/netn>

ACADIA NP • APPALACHIAN NST • BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS NRA • MARSH-BILLINGS-ROCKEFELLER NHP • MINUTE MAN NHP
MORRISTOWN NHP • ROOSEVELT-VANDERBILT NHS • SAINT-GAUDENS NHS • SAUGUS IRON WORKS NHS • SARATOGA NHP • WEIR FARM NHS

