

*Aster laevis* (*Symphyotrichum l.*) - Smooth Blue Aster



Native to the open woods and dry prairies of Canada and the United States, the smooth blue aster is a low maintenance, fall-blooming perennial, growing 2 feet to 3 1/2 feet tall and wide. Dozens of 1 inch to 1 1/4 inch lavender-blue ray flowers with yellow centers bloom in late autumn, with bloom often extending into November. The stems and top side of its leaves are smooth to the touch, different from that of other asters.

Plants remain upright with arching branches into late autumn due to its tough stem that often takes on a shade of blue during the growing season.

Hardy to USDA zone 4 (-30 degrees F), the smooth blue aster grows best in average dry to medium, well-drained soil in full sun. It is a non-aggressive plant whose rhizomatous root system permits it to slowly spread. Plants tolerate drought and are somewhat resistant to deer and rabbit damage. It also is tolerant to the black walnut tree. To encourage dense plants, foliage can be cut back to six inches in late spring. Pruning is not vital to this plant, however, as it rarely flops. The smooth blue aster also is a good cut flower.

This aster is attractive to butterflies and other pollinators for the nectar of its flowers. It also is the larval host for the pearl crescent butterfly.