



# CULTIVATION NOTES

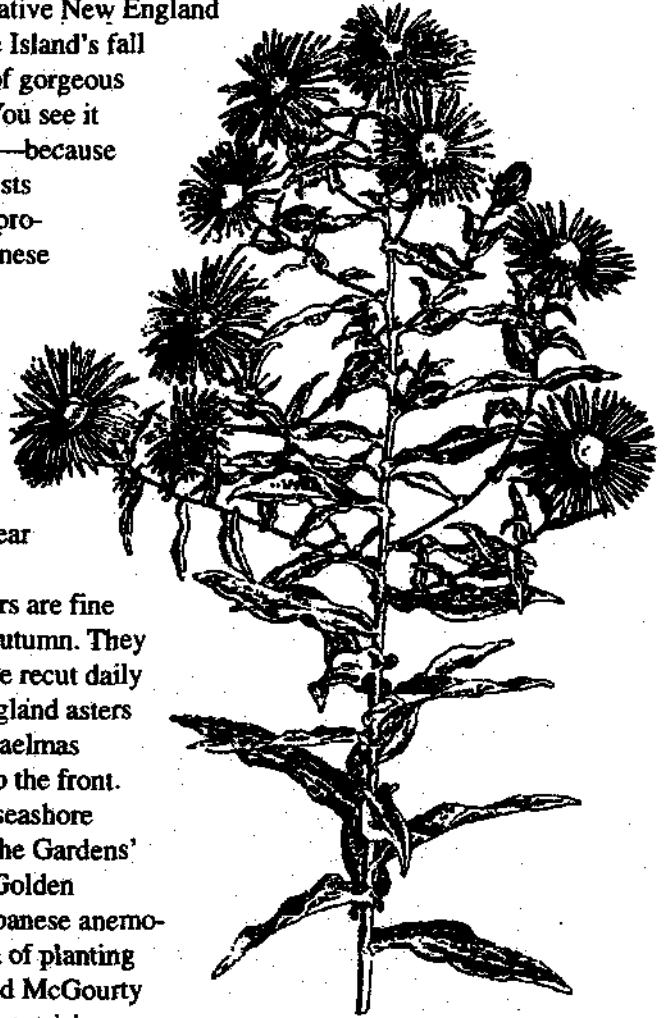
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## New England Aster & New York Aster

*Aster novae-angliae* L. & *Aster novi-belgii* L.  
Rhode Island Native Plants

Family ASTERACEAE  
by Anne B. Wagner

"Aster" derives from the Greek word for "star" and our native New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae* L.) plays a starring role in Rhode Island's fall landscape. Stout, bristly, four-foot stems hold aloft clusters of gorgeous violet ray flowers surrounding yellow-orange disc flowers. You see it everywhere—fields, thickets, shores, roadsides, forest edges—because it is adaptable. Europeans adored the flower that early botanists collected from North America, and European breeders have produced many cultivars of New England Aster. Currently, Japanese breeders are developing varieties for the cut flower industry. Smaller-flowered and smoother-stemmed, but equally appealing is the paler New York Aster (*Aster novi-belgii* L.) from which Europeans produced Michaelmas daisies, so called because they bloom in England on September 29, Michaelmas in the Christian calendar. New York Asters are also tolerant of a wide range of habitats, although they grow most commonly in damp, even marshy areas, mostly near the coast.



Both New England and New York asters and their cultivars are fine garden plants, extending the flowering season well into the autumn. They make good cut flowers, lasting a week in the vase if stems are recut daily and the water kept clean. New York Aster and taller New England asters belong toward the back of the border, while the shorter Michaelmas daisies, which resemble cushion mums, look well tucked into the front. Phillips (1985) suggests native sunflowers, goldenrods, and seashore mallows as companions to the asters in a natural garden. Niche Gardens' catalog recommends pairing 'Purple Dome' with *Solidago* 'Golden Fleece.' Asters also blend well with chrysanthemums and Japanese anemones. If you like shocking combinations, try Allen Lacy's idea of planting bright red *Crocasmia* 'Lucifer' with purple 'Hella Lacy.' Fred McGourty combines 'Alma Potsche' with *Sedum* 'Vera Jameson' and *Artemisia lactiflora*. In my garden, I've combined the big, blowzy *Boltonias* 'Snowbank' and 'Pink Beauty' with New England Asters. It's a great season finale!

Remember, only the wild natives come true from seed; deadhead cultivars and propagate by division or cuttings. All asters benefit from two or three pinchings in June and July to shape the plants. Taller specimens need staking or support with rings or brush. Asters demand dry foliage and excellent air circulation to retard mildew and subsequent loss of foliage, so water at ground level and thin plants to three or four stems.

Asters are good bee and butterfly nectar plants; they bloom as the Monarchs prepare to migrate.

## CULTIVATION NOTES

*Aster novae-angliae* L.

New England Aster

Perennial. Purple, lavender, or pink daisy-like flowers, 1 to 2", with 40-100 rays, in flat clusters at tips of stems, September to frost. Alternate, rough, entire leaves have heart-shaped bases that clasp the stems. 2-5' tall in sunny fields, damp meadows, forest edges, roadsides.

*Aster novi-belgii* L.

New York Aster

Perennial. Violet to whitish daisy-like flowers, 3/4 to 1 1/4", with 20-50 rays, in clusters more widely spaced than New England Aster. Slender, smooth, branching stems, 1-4' tall. Leaves about 3", narrow, lance-shaped and sessile (sometimes somewhat clasping). Sunny, damp to marshy areas of the coastal plain. Cultivars of *Aster novi-belgii* are widely available as Michaelmas daisies. They resemble cushion mums, grow about 1 1/2 to 3', bloom in late August to mid-October, and are available in red, white, and lavender.

**Propagation from cuttings:** Take 6-8" tip cuttings in June before flower shoots develop. Stick in moist medium of 1/2 sand and 1/2 peatmoss. Maintain damp medium and high humidity. In 4 to 5 weeks or when roots form, pot up in ordinary potting soil in 3" pots. Plant out in the fall.

**Propagation from divisions:** Divide in spring or late fall every two years. Lift clump, take 2 or 3 stem sections from the edges, replant 2" apart with top of rhizome even with soil surface; discard center.

**Propagation from seed:** Seeds develop 2 to 3 weeks after the ray flowers drop. Allow to mature until the nutlets are dry and loose. According to Phillips (1985), only a small percentage of seeds are viable; break some seeds open and check for the moist, white embryo. Sow heavily. Sow ripe seed outside in containers or garden bed; germination occurs in the spring.

Dry seed may also be stored in the refrigerator and sown indoors or outdoors in a cold frame in late winter. Germination usually occurs in 1 to 2 weeks. When rosettes have 3 or 4 leaves, pot up in 3" pots and commence weekly feeding.

**RIWPS Policy:** Never dig plants in the wild without written permission of the landowner. Take seeds sparingly.

**My own notes:**

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**Illustration** from Mrs. Dana's *How to Know the Wildflowers*, Dover Publications, Inc., NY.