





4–5 ft
Nectar



Monarch butterfly on Elliott's aster

With a bounty of beautiful blooms, there is no better genus of wildflowers than aster (*Symphotrichum* spp.) for attracting pollinators to your landscape.

Of the 26 aster species native to Florida, several are well-suited for landscape use. Climbing aster (*S. carolinianum*) is a sprawling, vinelike shrub. It occurs naturally in coastal hammocks, wet flatwoods and along the edges of swamps, springs and streams. Elliott's aster (*S. elliotii*) is an erect, multi-branched herbaceous perennial that occurs in wet flatwoods, swamps and freshwater marshes. Both species can be found nearly throughout the peninsula and into the eastern Panhandle, although Climbing aster has a slightly greater distribution.

As fall- and winter-flowering species, Climbing aster and Elliott's aster help extend the options for nectar and pollen available to pollinators. Climbing aster is one of the few wildflowers that will bloom in December.

## Description

Climbing aster's limbs can extend to 8 feet or more. Flowers are 1 to 2 inches in diameter and have a very sweet fragrance. They have dense centers of yellow-orange disk florets. Ray florets vary in color from lavender to purplish-pink to violet. Leaves are grayish-green and elliptical to ovate with entire margins. Climbing aster blooms in the fall and continues into January; it may bloom year-round in favorable conditions.

Elliott's aster can grow to 4 or 5 feet tall. Its flowers are about 1 inch in diameter with pale, lavender ray florets surrounding a center of yellow-orange disk florets. Flowers are born in dense, crownlike clusters. Leaves are shiny and elliptical



Climbing aster flowers and flower buds

to lance-shaped with toothed margins. Elliott's aster typically blooms in late fall and will die back in winter.

## Planting

The sprawling nature of Climbing aster makes it suitable for growing along a trellis or fence. Elliott's aster is best for a naturalistic planting, and must be frequently maintained in a more formal setting. Both are prolific self-seeders. Elliott's aster will also spread by suckering.

## Butterflies and bees

The flowers draw honey bees and myriad native bees, including polyester, sweat, cuckoo, leafcutter, mining, bumble and miner bees. Butterflies and moths also love them: Monarchs, Pearl crescents, skippers, fritillaries, Common buckeyes, Gray hairstreaks, swallowtails and sulphurs have been known to frequent the flowers for nectar.

## Seeds

Elliott's aster seeds are available commercially. Sow in fall.

## Plants

Climbing aster is generally available from native plant nurseries. Elliott's aster is becoming more available.

## Care

Cut back Climbing aster in late winter after flowering to encourage future blooms and healthy growth. Elliott's aster can sucker and form dense colonies. Suckers can be removed, but must be tended to throughout the growing

season to keep them from outcompeting other species. Both species can be problematic in formal landscapes as they can take on a tangled or chaotic appearance; however, they can be pruned to any shape and also perform well as a hedge.

## Site conditions

Both Elliott's and Climbing aster prefer sandy, loamy or organic soils that are moist, although they can tolerate moderately dry soils. Plant in full sun to partial shade. Neither is salt tolerant.

## Hardiness zones

Climbing aster and Elliott's aster are suited for zones 8A–11.

## Other species

Other species of *Symphotrichum* may be available from native nurseries. Rice button aster (*S. dumosum*) grows 2–3 feet tall and produces small, whitish-lavender flowers. It suckers in single stalks. Georgia aster (*S. georgianum*) has cornflower blue to purple ray florets and contrasting white anthers. It requires a bit more moisture and sun than *S. elliotii* or *S. carolinianum*.

Eastern silver aster (*S. concolor*) is an upland species that is very drought tolerant. Its flowers are deep violet and born in fall on the ends of long stalks. It gets its name from its silvery-green foliage. Walter's aster (*S. walteri*) is an upland species that prefers dry, well-drained soils. Its flowers are smaller and have fewer ray florets and more distinct disk florets. It should not be planted south of Central Florida.



Barred yellow sulphur on Climbing aster