

Walter's aster

(*Symphyotrichum walteri*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Walter's aster is an herbaceous perennial wildflower found in sandhills and pine flatwoods. It blooms in late fall and early winter, providing nectar and pollen to butterflies, bees and other pollinators at a time when floral resources are limited.

The compound flowers of Walter's aster consist of many lavender ray florets surrounding a center of yellow to reddish tubular disk florets. The base of the flowerhead is cupped in green, sepal-like bracts. Stem leaves are small, linear to hastate, and sessile, with acute tips and entire margins. Leaves often curve away from the stem. Leaf arrangement is generally alternate but may be somewhat spiraled. Stems are rough, branched and may be decumbent or erect. Fruits are specialized achenes called cypselae.



Photo by Mary Keim

The species epithet *walteri* is an homage to British botanist Thomas Walter (c. 1740–1789), author of *Flora Caroliniana*, the first North American flora resource to utilize the Linnean binomial taxonomic naming system.

Members of the *Symphyotrichum* genus were once classified in the genus *Aster*, which contained over 600 species. All have since been reclassified into 10 different genera. The genus name *Symphyotrichum* is from the Greek *sýmphysis*, meaning "growing together," and *thrix*, or "hair." It refers to a basal ring of hairs or bristles (pappi) thought to occur on New England aster (*Aster novi-belgii*, now *Symphyotrichum novi-belgii*); however, this characteristic is absent in most modern *Symphyotrichum* species.

Family: Asteraceae (Aster, composite or daisy family)

Native range: Scattered throughout many Central and North Florida counties

To see where natural populations of Walter's aster have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Dry to moist, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: Up to 2' tall when flowering

Walter's aster is not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see it.

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PLANT PROFILE:



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