Stokes' aster
(Stokesia laevia)

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

Stokes' aster is an herbaceous perennial wildflower native to only nine counties in Florida (but more common throughout the Southeast). It occurs naturally in savannas, flatwoods, roadside depressions and pitcherplant bog margins. Flowers typically bloom in spring and summer, but may bloom throughout the year, attracting a variety of bees, wasps and butterflies.

Photo by Mary Keim

Stokes' aster begins as a basal rosette of long (1'+), straplike leaves, from which one or more stems emerge. Flowers are borne singularly atop each stem. They are large (2–3"+ in diameter), showy and may be bluish-purple, lavender, pinkish or even white. Flowerheads are comprised of many tubular disk florets surrounded by deeply lobed ray florets. Stigmas are whitish and prominent. Leaves are toothed near the base, with glandular and pubescent surfaces. They are alternately arranged. Fruits are tiny achenes.

Stokesia laevis is the only species in the Stokesia genus, making it a monotypica taxon. The genus and common name refer to the English botanist Jonathan Stokes (1755–1831).

Family: Asteraceae (Aster, daisy or composite family)

Native range: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Bay, Calhoun, Liberty, Franklin, Wakulla, Nassau and Flagler counties

> *To see where natural populations of Stokes' aster have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.*

Hardiness: Zones 8–10

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist, well-drained, acidic to neutral soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 1–2' tall and wide

Propagation: Division, seed

Garden tips: Stokes' aster works well in mixed wildflower and butterfly gardens. It can spread and may require occasional thinning. Remove spent flowerheads to encourage a longer flowering period.

Plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.