

Perennial saltmarsh aster

(*Symphyotrichum tenuifolium*)

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

Perennial saltmarsh aster has been described online as a “weak straggly plant,” however, as one of the few and often the only large-flowered species present among the grasses and rushes of the salt marsh, it plays an important ecological role for native bees! It forms dense clumps or mats, making it quite conspicuous even though its flowers are small and sparse. It blooms from summer to early winter.



Photo by Emily Bell

The species epithet *tenuifolium* is derived from the Latin *tenu*, meaning “slender,” and *foli*, meaning “leaves.” This refers to the narrowly lanceolate leaves which are simple and alternately arranged. Although soft, they almost appear to come to a sharp point at the tips. Leaf margins are entire. Stems are flexuous and typically glabrous. Its yellow disc florets are surrounded by many white to pale purple ray florets.

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: Coastal counties throughout Florida

To see where natural populations of Perennial saltmarsh aster have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Saline soils, predominantly sandy and/or peaty

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: Herbaceous with spreading stems, reaching up to 4 feet

Perennial saltmarsh aster plants are not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see them.

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Florida Wildflower Foundation • P O Box 941691, Maitland, FL 32794-1691 • 407-622-1606 • www.FlaWildflowers.org

