



Founded in 1997.  
Logo art of Tall Goldenrod,  
*Solidago altissima*,  
by Nat Cleavitt, 2006.

# Solidago

Newsletter of the  
Finger Lakes Native Plant Society

Volume 24, No. 3



Autumn 2023

## PHOTO ESSAY

# Late Summer Blends to Autumn Glory...

by Robert Wesley



**New England Aster**  
(*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*), with its large and showy flower heads. One of our most striking fall flowers, and distinctively fragrant. The whole plant has small gland-tipped hairs with a droplet of sticky, resinous, fragrant essence. They are blooming now.



For a long time, I have thought that this purple and this golden-yellow should be our New York State colors, as worn by **New England Aster** (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*) and **Tall Goldenrod** (*Solidago altissima*). These wildflowers can be seen abundantly in so many of our fields and roadsides.



➤ **Old-field Milkwort** (*Polygala sanguinea*) is a delightful little plant that shares these colors. It is often found in dry, rather barren sites on hilltops. It also goes by the name **Candyroot**.  
I don't know why.



◀ More **New England Aster**.



**Grass-of-Parnassus** (*Parnassia glauca*)



**Dotted Mint** (*Monarda punctata*)



## TWO FLOWERS OF LATE SUMMER

**Grass-of-Parnassus** (*Parnassia glauca*) is clearly not a grass, but such are common names. Research using molecular and genetic methods places them close to *Euonymus* and *Celastrus*. Not common for us, they may be found in rich fens and on limy, seepy cliffs.

**Dotted Mint** or **Horsemint** (*Monarda punctata*) is a plant of dry, sandy open areas. It is often grown as an ornamental and for good reason. It is native here, but rare because we don't have much of its preferred habitat. It is really a plant of pine barrens, like those on L.I. and in New Jersey. This far north it is an annual, but farther south it is perennial.

## ANOTHER LATE SUMMER BLOOM

This is our native  
**Pasture Thistle**  
(*Cirsium pumilum*).

It is one of the  
showiest, most  
attractive thistles,  
having very large  
flower heads.

Here you can see it  
with its specialist  
pollinator, the  
**Thistle Bee**  
(*Melissodes desponsa*).





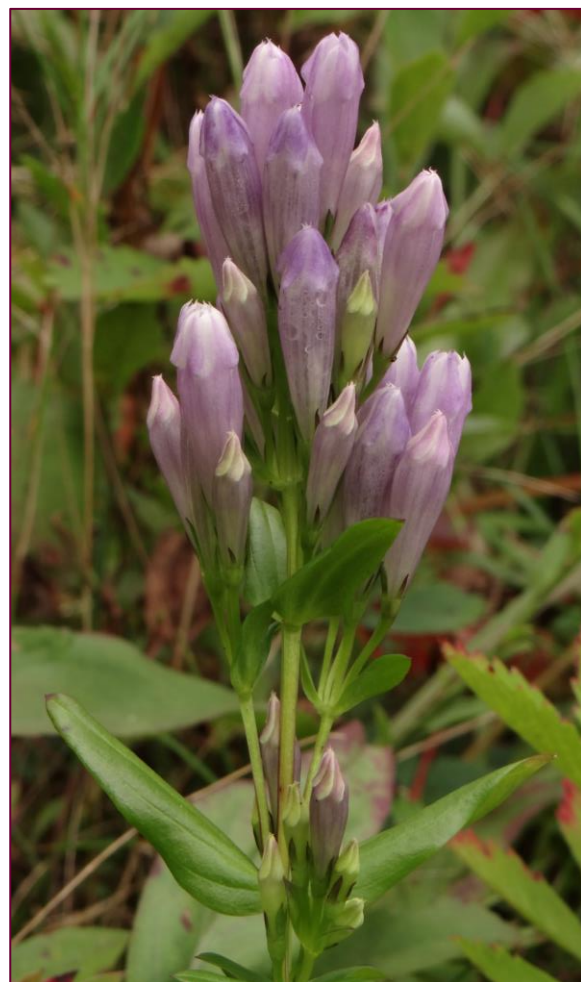
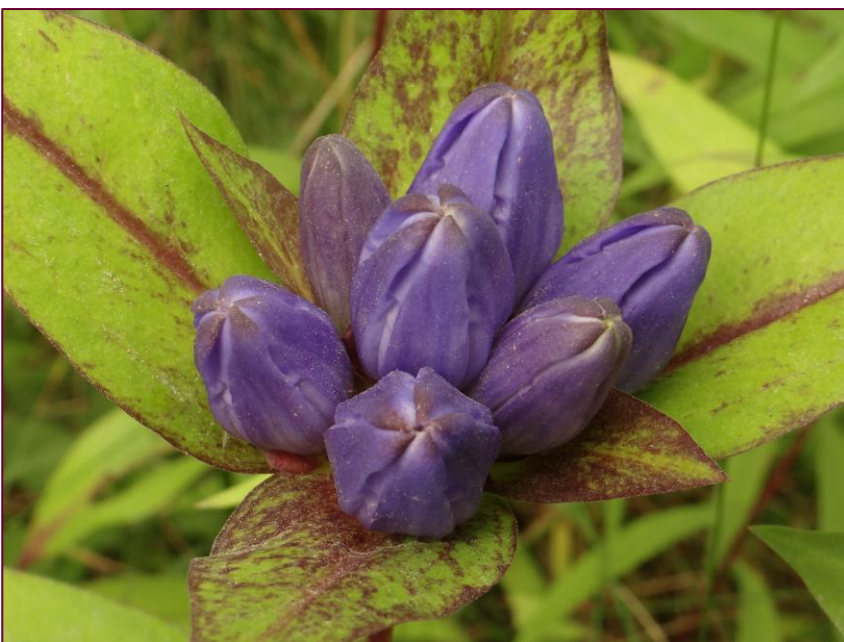
GENTIANS ARE  
SIGNATURE  
FLOWERS OF LATE  
SUMMER & EARLY  
AUTUMN

◀ **Andrews'  
Bottle Gentian**  
(*Gentiana  
andrewsii*).

Not common for  
us, and usually  
restricted to very  
limy situations.  
Note the whitish-  
pink fringes at  
the top of each  
flower.

▶ The **Stiff Gentian** (*Gentianella quinquefolia*)  
is an upright plant with many pale violet  
flowers. It often grows in south-facing,  
brushy edge habitats.

▼ The **Bottle Gentian** (*Gentiana clausa*) is  
similar to Andrews' Bottle Gentian, but lacks  
the white fringes at the top of the corolla, and  
may grow in more acidic, often wet situations.



## OUR LATEST – BLOOMING GENTIAN



**Fringed Gentian** (*Gentianopsis crinita*) is one of the latest to flower. Its corolla lobes open in bright sunlight.



**Smooth Blue Aster** (*Symphyotrichum laeve*) is another autumn beauty.



**Seaside Goldenrod**  
(*Solidago sempervirens*).

Because we have been using way too much salt on our roads for way too long, it is now not uncommon to find Seaside Goldenrod and other sea beach and salt marsh plants naturalizing along roadsides.



These are along Rt. 13 near Ithaca. The closeup includes a male **Eastern Bumble Bee** (*Bombus impatiens*) on this goldenrod. It is very attractive to pollinators.



▲ **Dwarf Goldenrod** (*Solidago nemoralis*) is a small plant that can't stand much competition. It is often found in dry, open, more or less barren places.

### FALL ORCHIDS!

Yes, there are a few:

**Fen Ladies' Tresses** (*Spiranthes incurva*), top left, and

**Autumn Ladies' Tresses** (*Spiranthes ochroleuca*), left.

The Autumn Ladies' Tresses is often still in flower in October.



*All photographs by Robert Wesley.*

## THE FINGER LAKES NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY STEERING COMMITTEE

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**Robert Wesley:** President, Outings & Education



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**David Werier:** Newsletter Editor Emeritus



## Please Contribute to *Solidago*

WE WELCOME CONTRIBUTIONS THAT FEATURE WILD PLANTS OF THE FINGER LAKES REGION OF NEW YORK AND NEARBY. We include cryptogams (bryophytes, lichens, fungi, and algae) as "flora," and recognize that green plants provide habitats and substrates for these and many animals, especially insects. We are interested in zoological associations as long as plants are an integral part of the story.

We can use a wide spectrum of material in a variety of writing styles. Our regular columns include **LOCAL FLORA** (plant lists or details of species from specific sites), **OUTINGS** (reports of FLNPS-sponsored excursions), and **PLANT PROFILES** (on specific local plants). We also occasionally publish **APPRECIATIONS** (memorials to local botanists and naturalists), **REVIEWS** (of books, talks, meetings, workshops, and nurseries), **LETTERS** (commentaries and letters to the editor), **ESSAYS** (on botanical themes), **VERSE** (haiku, limericks, sonnets, and poems of less formal structure), **ART** (botanical illustrations, plant designs, pencil sketches, decorations), and **PHOTOGRAPHS** (stand-alone images, photo essays, and full-page composite plates, or originals that can be scanned and returned). We also can always use **FILLERS** (very short notes, small images, cartoons) for the last few inches of a column.

## *Solidago*

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*Published quarterly at Ithaca, New York, USA.*

FLNPS (founded in 1997) is dedicated to the promotion of our native flora. We sponsor talks, walks, and other activities related to conservation of native plants and their habitats. *Solidago* is published as a colorful online version, and a B&W paper version that is mailed. The online format is posted 3 months after publication. Please see [www.flnps.org](http://www.flnps.org) for details of membership, past *Solidago* issues, and updates about our programs.



Flower heads of splendid New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*). Photo by Robert Wesley.

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\*Please send *Solidago*  
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to Robert Dirig, Editor, at  
[editorofsolidago@gmail.com](mailto:editorofsolidago@gmail.com)

**Deadline for the December 2023  
issue is November 15<sup>th</sup> !**

## NAME THAT PLANT CONTEST

The photo from last issue's [*Solidago* 24(2), p. 4] NAME THAT PLANT CONTEST was of **Perfoliate Bellwort** (*Uvularia perfoliata*). In New York there are two species of bellworts (*Uvularia*) that have the base of the leaf blades appearing to be pierced by the stem (*i.e.*, perfoliate). These are the Perfoliate Bellwort and the Large-flowered Bellwort (*U. grandiflora*). The two differ in numerous features. Usually the large-flowered bellwort is more robust, has more flowers, and is considered showy. Still, there is something about the Perfoliate Bellwort that strikes my fancy. Look for some in the higher hills of the region and see if you agree. Thanks to all who entered the contest and congratulations to contest winners: **Bob Dirig, David DuBois, Susanne Lorbeer, Joe O'Rourke, Rosemarie Parker, and Charlie Smith.**

**THIS ISSUE'S MYSTERY PLANT IS SHOWN BELOW.**



Please submit your answer to **David Werier (Nakita@lightlink.com)**. Common and/or scientific names are acceptable. More than one guess is allowed. Hints and suggestions are often provided to contest participants who try.

The photographs were taken in New York by David Werier on *July 25, 2019* in Warren Co. (basal rosettes of leaves, lower right); *July 19, 2021* in Franklin Co. (closeup of heads of flowers, center and upper right); and *July 26, 2022* in Herkimer Co. (whole plants, left; and extensive population, background).



## PLANT TRIVIA *by Norm Trigoboff*

1. What guides the rootlets of ivy and other vines to grow toward tree trunks?

2. You sit in your garden and see a crescent moon glowing between an evening primrose on the right and a moonflower on the left. The horns of the moon point to the evening primrose. Is the moon waxing or waning?

3. Name the odd man out: Devil's Trumpet (*Datura*), Evening Primrose, Casa Blanca Lily, Moonseed, Moonflower (*Ipomoea*), Japanese Wisteria, Flowering Tobacco, Night Phlox, Chocolate Daisy.

4a. **Match** these less common common names: Stinking Willie, Sticky Willie, Turtle Legs, Alligator Pear, Mother-in-Law Tongue, Devil's Dipstick, and Devil's Fudge; **to** their more common common names: Mistletoe (many spp.), Northern Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*), Avocado (*Persea americana*), Snake Plant (*Dracaena trifasciata*), Cleavers (*Gallium aparine*), Common Stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*), and Red Trillium (*Trillium erectum*).

4b. Name the odd one out in the list of 4a.

5. If you like these trivia questions, you might be a metagrobologist. A metagrobologist is a person who studies:

**A.** non-taxonomic plant groups. **B.** puzzles. **C.** plant literature. **D.** cryptogams. **E.** how to waste time. **F.** gangsta bryology moves.

6. Which is the odd one out: the pimento in your Spanish olive, paprika, fried sweet peppers, black pepper, or ketchup?

7. The Scoville Scale is:

**A.** a nocturnal insect that deprives trees of sleep. **B.** a skin disease that plagues gardeners who work at night. **C.** a way to rank the hardness of nut shells. **D.** a measure of the heat of hot peppers. **E.** a device that tells when maple syrup has cooked enough.

8. Name the odd one out: Skunk Cabbage leaves, rose stems, coconut husks, corn cobs, moss, mullein leaves.

9. **Groundsel Shrub** or **Eastern Baccharis** is a common woody composite that likes salt marshes and higher ground near the coast of the eastern U. S. Why might it be bad to plant this locally, as on the south side of Tower Road at Cornell?

10. What plant has the worst stinging hairs?

## FLNPS Autumn 2023 Calendar

As autumn proceeds, we welcome members and guests to our new season of presentations and other programs!

**September 9<sup>th</sup> (Saturday):** The last of the 2023 **FLNPS Native Garden Visits**, in Skaneateles, Cortland, & Ithaca. Cortland & Ithaca are self-guided; Skaneateles requires sign up, due to unexpected parking limits. 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. *Please see our website for details.*

**September 17<sup>th</sup> (Sunday):** A walk emphasizing **Asters & Goldenrods**, led by **ROBERT WESLEY**, Botanist at the Cornell Botanic Gardens, 1:00 p.m. Place to be determined, but near Ithaca. *Please check our website.*

**\*September 19<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday):** Our first evening program on **Lawns to Meadows** by **SAM QUINN** of SUNY-ESF (7:00 p.m.) at the Cornell Botanic Gardens' Nevin Welcome Center, 124 Comstock Knoll Drive in Ithaca (also Zoom).

**October 7<sup>th</sup> (Saturday):** A morning walk at Watkins Glen State Park emphasizing **Mosses**, led by **NORM TRIGOBOff**, local bryologist. Carpooling from the Cooperative Extension parking lot in Ithaca. Check our website for times of departure from Ithaca and beginning of the walk at Watkins Glen.

**\*October 17<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday):** **DANIEL WEITOISH** of the Cornell Arboretum will present an **American Chestnut Update** at 7:00 p.m., at the Nevin Welcome Center (also on Zoom).

**October 21 (Saturday):** **KRISSY BOYS** will lead a **Seed Collecting Walk**, beginning at 1:00 p.m., the site to be determined closer to that time. This annual walk is an important source of seed for the FLNPS seed exchange and for Cornell's Mundy Wildflower Garden. Join us to find seeds and learn about the plants they will grow. If there is sufficient seed, you may take a bit home for your own propagation efforts. *Please check our website for location details and possible rain date, in early October.*

**\*November 21<sup>st</sup> (Tuesday):** Evening program. Speaker and topic to be determined, 7:00 p.m.

**\*December 19<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday):** The annual **FLNPS Solstice Celebration** is tentatively scheduled for 7:00 p.m., with confirmation and details to come.

**\*FLNPS evening Talks and the Solstice Celebration begin on Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. at the Cornell Botanic Gardens' Nevin Welcome Center, 124 Comstock Knoll Drive, at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. Please check our website ([www.flnps.org](http://www.flnps.org)) for a map, confirmations, updates, and other details.**



## ANSWERS to Plant Trivia

by Norm Trigoboff

1. The rootlets grow toward the darker side of the plant. (See: *The Walker's Guide to Outdoor Clues and Signs*, T. Gooley, 2014)

2. Waning. In Ithaca and all of the northern hemisphere, the rule is: what you see at the right-most edge of the moon's disc (moon or dark) will grow.

3. Moonseed, named for its odd crescent moon shaped seed, blooms in the daytime. All the others bloom at night. Such flowers, especially the ones with strong scents, are often sought for moon gardens. Mock Orange may show up in moon gardens. They bloom in the day too, but the scent is stronger at night. Four O'clocks are sometimes listed as night blooming, perhaps for children with early bedtimes.

4a. Stinking Willie = Red Trillium; Sticky Willie = Cleavers; Turtle Legs = Northern Pitcher Plant; Alligator Pear = Avocado; Mother-in-Law Tongue = Snake Plant; Devil's Dipstick = Common Stinkhorn; Devil's Fudge = Mistletoe.

4b. Devil's Dipstick is a fungus. The others are vascular plants.

5. B. Please rehearse how to say metagrobologist before you hurt yourself trying to use it in a sentence.

6. All are peppers of some kind, except ketchup, which is tomato based.

7. D. The Scoville Organoleptic Test was named for Wilbur Lincoln Scoville, a pharmacist who developed it in 1912.

8. Rose stems. All the others saw use in the pre-toilet paper era and rarely today. For a load of similar fun facts, see: *The Truth About Poop*, 2004, by S. E. Goodman: but consider that you can make do with the facts supplied here.

9. In the northeast, *Baccharis halimifolia*, which can hit 12 feet tall, is now found on highways far inland of its natural range thanks to road salt. This and other *Baccharis* species have invaded Australia, Spain, and other countries. Fun fact: The European Union forbids import and trade of *B. halimifolia* everywhere in the EU. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baccharis\\_halimifolia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baccharis_halimifolia)

10. *Dendrocnide moroides*, an Australian shrub in the nettle family, also called gympie-gympie (in the Gubbi Gubbi language), has a fine fuzz of neurotoxin-laden stinging hairs. One source says the sting feels like being burnt with hot acid and electrocuted at the same time. In bad cases, pain may last years. Travel tip: pack toilet paper when you bushwhack in strange lands.



## Thank You!

THIS ISSUE was again a joy to create, due the generosity of **writers** Joe O'Rourke, Arieh Tal, Norm Trigoboff, David Werier, & Robert Wesley; all but Norm also contributed **photographs** to accompany their prose. Special thanks to Robert Wesley for sharing his glorious images of late summer and autumn flora of the Finger Lakes Region!

**Layout & design** by the Editor, **proofreading** by Rosemarie Parker, and **printing** by Gnomon Copy. Anna Stalter emailed copies, Pat Curran mailed paper copies, & Rosemarie posted to the web.

Please check our website ([www.flnps.org](http://www.flnps.org)) regularly throughout the autumn for announcements and details of walks, talks, and other events. Many thanks to our Steering Committee (p. 9) and all of our members for supporting FLNPS and its activities. We are happy to resume in-person/Zoom evening programs, and wish everyone in our reading audience a delightful autumn filled with joyous outdoor revels with the fall flora!

— Robert Dirig



## Downy Rattlesnake Plantain

by Joe O'Rourke

**My first encounter** with this plant occurred in July 2004. I was walking along one of the trails at the **O. D. VON ENGELN PRESERVE** in Malloryville, when a colony of plantain-like leaves caught my attention. Unlike members of the common lawn *Plantago* genus, these leaves were strikingly beautiful. They were very dark green with white, interconnected stripes (reticulations). It was too early in the season for flowers, so I had to try to identify it based solely on the leaves. Fortunately it was not difficult, as this is one of our few orchids whose leaves may surpass the flowers in their beauty.

I contacted **Bob Beck**, the land steward of the preserve, a few years later, as I wanted to see it in flower. He assured me it was still there, but could not guarantee I would find it flowering in any given year. It is an evergreen perennial herb, so I went back to the preserve year after year, but never found the plant again.

The orchid I found is commonly called **Downy Rattlesnake Plantain** (*Goodyera pubescens*). According to the 2008 publication "Vascular Plant Species of the Cayuga Lake Basin of New York State" (Robert Wesley *et al.*), it is one of three *Goodyera* species in our area, one of which is likely no longer present (*G. repens*). The other, *G. tessellata*, does not have a whitish stripe down the center of the leaf.

The etymology of the name is interesting. The genus *Goodyera* comes from John Goodyer, a botanist from England in the early seventeenth century. The hairy leaves lend the species the name *pubescens*, although other *Goodyera* species are similarly hairy. “Rattlesnake” was given solely based on the striking patterns of the leaves, suggestive of a rattlesnake’s scales, but folklore suggested its use as an herbal remedy against snakebite. “Plantain” refers to the similar but less striking leaves of our Common Plantain (*Plantago major*).

Nearly twenty years later, I found myself again at the Malloryville preserve. I was walking with another FLNPS member, **Kathy Strickland**, and I mentioned having found Rattlesnake Plantain there years before. She said it was in bloom now in the nearby **LIME HOLLOW NATURE CENTER** preserve, another gem along the Fall Creek corridor. She sent me directions, and I was finally able to find it in full flower.

First impressions: The leaves were smaller than I had remembered them. They are typically less than 9 cm long. There was one colony off a trail, in open woods, with approximately twelve plants. Without Kathy’s excellent directions, I doubt if a casual hiker would ever notice them. The white flowers, to me, resembled Ladies’ Tresses (*Spiranthes* spp.). They were numerous, wrapped around the top third of a tall stem. Each flower is nearly spherical, 5 mm high, 5 mm long, and 6 mm wide. The flower lip is short, triangular, and curved downwards. The area where they were found was in rich, damp humus.

If you are lucky enough to stumble upon this plant, it will make your day. Especially if it is in flower!



Photos by the author.



LOCAL  
FLORA

## A New Key to the Asters of Tompkins County, N.Y.

During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the genus *Aster* (in North America) was split apart by plant scientists into seven genera: *Aster*, *Doellingeria*, *Eurybia*, *Ionactis*, *Oclemena*, *Sericocarpus*, and *Symphyotrichum*.

Plants occurring in Tompkins County, N. Y., that remain in the genus *Aster*, strictly speaking, are introduced garden plants from Eurasia, mainly *Aster tataricus*. The only other species in the genus *Aster* present in North America is *Aster alpinus*, which occurs in the Rocky Mountains and western Canada, in alpine tundra, montane to alpine meadows, and cold prairies. Unlike all of our local asters, *Aster alpinus* is a shrub. The type for the genus *Aster* (Linnaeus) is *Aster amellus*. It occurs in Europe, and is also a subshrub.

When speaking of particular species or genera of “aster”, we need to use the scientific names of the currently accepted genera. That’s beneficial. Using the generic names helps you understand the differences between the different species.

Of the genera that are found in North America in the wild, uncultivated, five are present in Tompkins County to some extent. The one that is not known to occur here is *Ionactis*. *Doellingeria*, *Oclemena* and *Sericocarpus* are all variously uncommon. *Doellingeria umbellata* is a tall plant of damp meadows, pond shores, thickets, and hedgerows. *Oclemena acuminata* is a medium-height plant of rich, mesic forests, in sites where the vegetation is not extremely dense. *Sericocarpus astroides* is another medium-height plant of dry to mesic, often sandy and/or disturbed soil, open woods, and clearings. The other species are more or less common.

**What’s not an aster?** Plants with yellow rays (dandelions, hawkweeds, ox tongue [*Picris*], etc.), are not closely related to asters. Plants with opposite leaves are not included among asters. No asters have lobed or compound leaves. **Fleabanes** (genus *Erigeron*, **1**) are similar to asters, and can be distinguished by their involucre, which are usually wider than tall, and phyllaries that are more or less the same length (except for *Erigeron canadensis* [Horseweed]).

**The curious pretender: English Daisy (Lawn Daisy).** The scientific name for this species is *Bellis perennis*, **2**. It’s neither an aster nor a native species. It is usually found on lawns or other disturbed sites where competing vegetation is sparse. It is short in stature, even when it doesn’t get mowed; perhaps 2-3 inches tall. It has white ray florets and yellow disc florets. All of its leaves are basal leaves. It produces only one flower head per plant. Unlike asters, the fruit lacks a pappus.



1. *Erigeron pulchellus*  
(Robin’s Plantain)



2. *Bellis perennis*  
(English Daisy)



3. *Symphyotrichum laeve*  
(Smooth Aster)

**What’s left? (“asters”, 3).** Plants that produce flower heads with both ray and disc florets. Ray florets that are white, pink, blue, or violet; longer than 3.0 mm (most species). Disc florets that are various shades of yellow or cream color (when fresh). Involucre that are taller than wide (most species). Involucral bracts (phyllaries) that are of unequal lengths (*i.e.*, graduated), the outer series being shorter than the inner series. The pappus consisting of minutely-barbed, hair-like bristles. Leaves that are alternate, unlobed and undivided.

**What do you need to know to get started?** Ideally, you need to see plants that are either in flower or in fruit. If the plants are just in leaf, you need to see at least the developing inflorescence; that is, what is its shape (flat or round-topped, vs. domed/peaked). It also helps to notice whether the basal and lower stem leaves are present shortly before the flowering period. With that information, you can eliminate certain species ahead of time.

The term “**cypsel**a (pl. **cypsel**ae)” refers to the fruit of a species in the Composite family. It is highly recommended that you bring along a hand lens when in the field in order to more easily view small details.

— Arie Tal, August 2023

[Link to the key itself:](#)

[https://www.botphoto.info/resources/resources\\_asteraceae/aster\\_key\\_tc\\_interactive/aster\\_key.pdf](https://www.botphoto.info/resources/resources_asteraceae/aster_key_tc_interactive/aster_key.pdf)

LOOKING BACK TO SUMMER ♦ *Photos by Robert Wesley*



**Purple Flowering Raspberry** or **Thimbleberry** (*Rubus odoratus*) is a favorite summer-flowering native shrub with delicious fruits. Last summer while picking some Thimbleberries, I came upon this cute little **Gray Tree Frog**.

