DENVER BOTANIC GARDENS

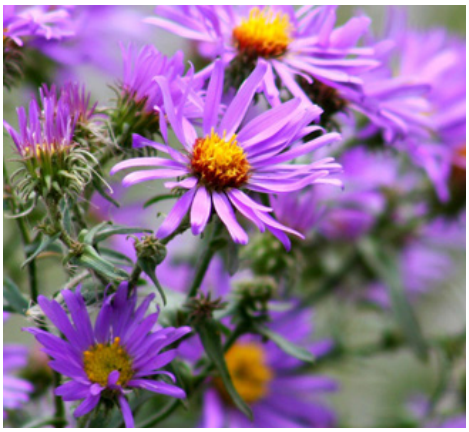
EcoQuest

September 2026

September EcoQuest: New England Aster

As summer ends, our September EcoQuest brings a special seasonal challenge: *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*. The New England aster is rarely documented in the Denver metro area, but it can be spotted with a keen eye. Although this aster is primarily found in the eastern half of the United States, it is also sprinkled throughout the West.

New England aster is considered globally secure (G5), but it is ranked imperiled (S2) in Colorado (NatureServe). Our herbarium records show that this species was documented a dozen times around the Denver metro area between 1916 and 2010. The most recent collection was made near Clear Creek in Wheat Ridge, along the Wheat Ridge–Miller Trailhead.



New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*), aninhafonte, some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.

Starting in 2021 this species was observed on iNaturalist. There are now 23 observations of New England aster on iNaturalist in the Denver metro area, but only four have reached research grade. This group is challenging to identify and we are not sure if these records are accurate. On the otherhand, it may mean there are populations that haven't been documented through collections in the last 16 years.

Help us document these imperiled populations by joining the iNaturalist search. Your observation could help us identify a location for botanical investigation and documentation, which is crucial for conservation.

How to locate, identify and observe:

New England aster is most likely to be found in meadows, roadsides, stream corridors and other moist or wet areas — particularly places where tall vegetation remains relatively undisturbed. From August through October, its leafy stems produce clusters of daisy-like flower heads with 40 – 75 dark pink to purple ray flowers surrounding a yellow center. Look closely and you will notice that the stems and the small bracts surrounding each flower head are covered with tiny gland-tipped hairs — a useful feature for distinguishing this species from other asters.

This perennial wildflower grows 1 to 4 feel tall, and the leaves are narrow and elongated, becoming smaller toward the tips of the stems. The upper leaves clasp the stem, while the lower leaves can be broader and more spoon-shaped.

If you find a possible New England aster, photograph the entire plant, leaves, flower heads, and stem and upload your observation to iNaturalist.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the City via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at iNaturalist.org.
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the "geoprivacy" of the observation to "obscured."
4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.
6. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.

What is the Goal?

The EcoFlora project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity, and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area's flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin

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