Hort Report October 2016

I would like to tell you about asters, and other genera of the family Asteraceae. The four varieties I have today are all herbaceous perennials, easy to grow, and most spread vigorously. They bloom at different times in the fall, and will tolerate dry shallow soil. They are attractive to butterflies and bees.

Aster tataricus is a native of Siberia, and my favorite. Unfortunately, it is blooming late this year, and you can’t really see how beautiful are the violet blue flowers with yellow centers. Kris says it’s a good cut flower, unlike the other specimens. This aster likes full sun, and may reach six feet. Mine grows in part shade, and usually only reaches four feet. The basal leaves grow quite large, and the thick stems never need staking. This is a very low maintenance plant; I don’t think I’ve ever had to weed around it!

The taxonomists have been hard at work, and have changed the formerly named Aster divaricatus to Eurybia divaricata. This is a native plant, and likes part or full shade. The white flowers with yellow to red centers grow in profusion, and spread freely. This plant blooms early; late July or early August, and keeps blooming for a couple of months. Mine grows under a maple tree, which is a tough spot, but does very well there. The delicate stems sometimes grow in a zigzag way, and the toothed heart shaped leaves are distinctive. An excellent plant for the shade or woodland garden, where it has plenty of room to spread. It’s commonly known as White Wood Aster.

Speaking of white flowers, my Esclepias (milkweed) ‘Hello Yellow’ self-seeded, and the flowers came out white instead of yellow!

Another native is Symphyotrichum laeve ‘Bluebeard’. This cultivar is a Mt. Cuba introduction, and I obtained it there. Although it prefers full sun, mine does fine in part shade in poor, dry soil. Commonly known as Smooth Aster, it has pretty violet-blue rays with yellow centers. It doesn’t bloom until September.

The last is Symphyotrichum novae-angliae, the New England Aster. Although the flowers are past, I wanted you to see how large the flower clusters are. This is a very showy three to six foot plant with pretty pink rays with yellow centers. This plant likes full sun, and mine need to be staked in order for them to stand up straight. In a sunnier location, they might not need staking. This plant starts blooming around the end of August, looks good through September, and is a native plant.