

UPLAND WHITE ASTER

By Shirley Froehlich, BSA

One of our native prairie flowers that has recently caught my eye is Upland White Aster *Oligoneuron album*. It has put on a spectacular show in my garden for several years.

DESCRIPTION

It is a small, bushy perennial growing 15-30 cm tall (6-12"). It stays in a clump and does not spread by roots. The leaves are linear-lanceolate, 10-15 cm long, firm and somewhat shiny. In early August the whole top of the plant is covered with lots and lots of white flowers. Everyone visiting in August wants to know what it is. When finished blooming in September the plant is covered with many, little tan pompoms. The seed is ready and awaiting dispersal by the wind and the birds. It self seeds somewhat in surrounding bare soil, but it doesn't become a problem. The Asters are a large and difficult group to classify. It was also called *Aster ptarmicoides* and *Solidago ptarmicoides* in the past.

NATIVE HABITAT

This is not a common wildflower. It can be found in eastern Manitoba in areas such as Bird's Hill Park, where the soil is quite sandy. It can also be found in several prairies within the city of Winnipeg and near Brennan Prairie by Oak Hammock Marsh where the soil is heavy clay.

CULTURE

In the garden Upland White Aster does best in full sun. It seems fairly adaptable to soil moisture from dry to medium to moist. My plants have done very well in a medium to moist location, however with too much moisture they probably won't live as long.

Upland White Aster is great planted in groups in flower beds or mixed with other native perennials such as Three Flowered Avens, Wild Flax, Pasture Sage, Coneflower, Whorled Milkweed, Dotted Blazing Star, Sheep Fescue and Side Oats Grama or Blue Grama Grass. This combination gives a succession of bloom throughout the season.

It can either be directly seeded outdoors or plants can be purchased to set out anytime from May to October. If you wish to grow your own plants from seed indoors, they germinate in 5-14 days with bottom heat for the soil around 21 degrees C. Bottom heat can be supplied by heating cables or by setting the tray just above a hot air register until germination begins. Plants will bloom the second year from seed.

Whether you have a traditional garden with mostly cultivated annual and perennial flowers or a mostly native garden, Upland White Aster will fit right in and reward you with many wonderful flowers.

Shirley is the owner of Prairie Originals, a nursery specialising in wildflowers and native prairie grasses near Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. www.prairieoriginals.com