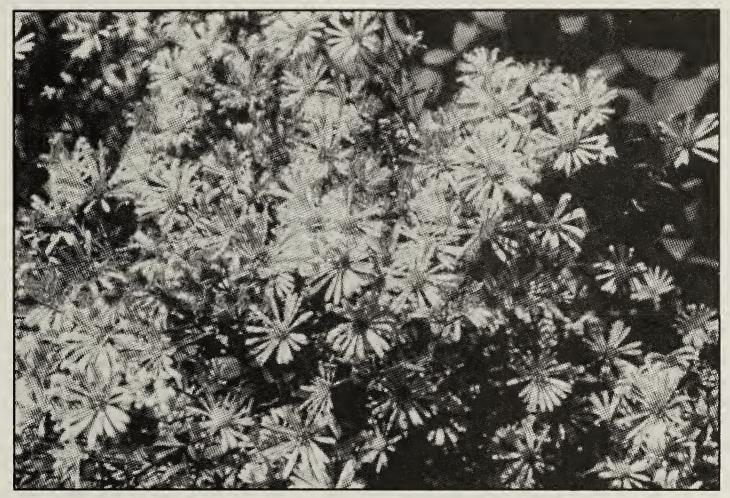
PLANTS

WHERE HAVE ALL OUR ASTERS GONE?

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Asters

Where *have* all our asters gone? Well, the plants are still here but their scientific names have been changed. Modern taxonomists no longer place any of Saskatchewan's 16 native aster species in the genus, *Aster*; they have reclassified them into five different genera, although mostly under *Symphyotrichum*.

Numerous plant taxonomic revisions and name changes have recently been made, most in association with the ongoing Flora of North America (FNA) Project and John Kartesz' Biota of North America Project (BONAP).² Newly assigned names for many plants of the Saskatoon area were given in my recent article on the flora of Peturrson Ravine.¹ I will not try to discuss the reasons, or pros and cons, regarding the

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innovations. Suffice it to say that they are generally accepted and will likely be reflected in floras and wildflower guides in the future.

What does this mean to the average naturalist? Not necessarily very much. The plants themselves remain unchanged, and we may continue using their common names as before. Scientific names have their value in "pinning down" exactly what particular plant is being referred to. This is especially important because of the multiplicity and non-standardization of plant common names. The table below summarizes the name changes for our asters and may help some readers to avoid confusion when confronted with the new scientific names.

COMMON NAME	FORMER LATIN NAME	NEW LATIN NAME
Western or Ascending Aster	Aster ascendens	Symphotrichum ascendens
Boreal or Bog Aster	Aster borealis	Symphotrichum boreale
Rayless Aster	Aster brachyactis	Symphotrichum ciliatum
Lindley's Blue Aster	Aster ciliolatus	Symphotrichum ciliolatum
Showy Aster	Aster conspicuus	Eurybia conspicua
Eaton's Aster	Aster eatonii	Symphotrichum eatonii
Many-flowered or Tufted Aster	Aster ericoides var. pansus	Symphotrichum ericoides var. pansum
Creeping White Prairie Aster	Aster falcatus var. commutatus	Symphotrichum falcatum var. commutatus
Western Willow Aster	Aster hesperius	Symphotrichum lanceolatum var. hesperium
Smooth Blue Aster	Aster laevis var. geyeri	Symphotrichum laeve var. geyeri
Large Northern Aster	Aster modestus	Canadanthus modestus
Few-flowered Aster	Aster pauciflorus	Almutaster pauciflorus
Purple-stemmed Aster	Aster puniceus	Symphotrichum puniceum
Eastern Willow Aster	Aster simplex	Symphotrichum lanceolatum var. lanceolatum
Flat-topped White Aster	Aster umbellatus var. pubens	Doellingeria umbellata var. pubens
White Upland Aster	Aster ptarmicoides	Solidago ptarmicoides

1. HARMS, V.L. 2001.Vascular plants of the Petursson Ravine area along the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon. *Blue Jay* 59(3): 134-152.

2. KARTESZ, J.T. 1999. A Synonymized Checklist and Atlas with Biological Attributes for the Vascular Flora of the United States, Canada, and Greenland. First Edition. *In*: Kartesz, J.T., and C.A. Meacham. Synthesis of North American Flora, Version 1.0. North Carolina Botanical Garden, Chapel Hill, NC.



The English called European asters both 'asters' and 'starworts.' *Aster*, Latin for 'star,' referred to the flower's star-like shape...In 1637 John Tradescant the Younger brought North American asters back from Virginia. These do not seem to have been noticed much until they were hybridized with European starworts. They were later renamed 'Michaelmas daisies' in Britain, because when the British family finally adopted Gregory XIII's revised calendar, the feast of Saint Michael coincided with their flowering....Michaelmas was always a date of beginnings: the academic year at Oxford and Cambridge, the quarterly court session, the day for debts to be settled and annual rents (often including a goose) to be paid. In the garden both Michaelmas daisies and Chinese asters bloom in autumn, magnificent curtain calls of summer but reminders too of new beginnings after winter's sleep."

- Diana Wells, 100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names, p.7-8.