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Asters

A garden's autumnal stars

As usual, the Greeks have a word for it. Aster means 'star' and asters are star bloomers in the autumn border.

This late in the year blossoms are harder and harder to come by, but asters bloom for weeks until they are done in by hard frost. And they don't require a lot of work from the gardener either. Just lots of sun and ordinary well-drained soil. Every two or three years clumps can be divided in the early spring.

In New England we're used to wild asters growing along the roadside in shades of white, or violet and blue. Cultivated asters provide a wider range of color.

There are two pink asters that I particularly like, one old and one new. Harrington's Pink has small, pale pink flowers on a tall rangy plant that needs staking on my windy hill. My neighbor, an olympic-class gardener, taught me how to pinch back, and keep pinching back the outer stems of a clump and some of the stems closer to the center, letting the ones in the middle grow a little taller. You end up with stems of staggered heights that help hold themselves up, even when fall breezes tear down our hill.

A new and improved aster is Alma Potchke which produces multitudes of beautiful bright pink flowers on three-foot plants for six weeks beginning in early September. It's a wonderful color and looks as pretty in flower arrangements as it does in the garden.

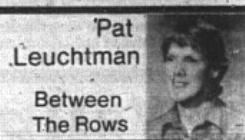
Slightly taller than Alma Potchke is September Ruby. The name is quite descriptive of the color. These three asters will give you a full range of color from pale pink to a deeper, warm pink to a rich crimson.

Michaelmas daisy

The Michaelmas daisy is another member of the aster family. They bloom during the same period as the New England asters, from late August through the middle of October and have the same cultural requirements. Eventide is a beautiful shade of purple — although I have heard some people describe it as deep blue. Coombe Violet is also a deep rich shade of purple, but is a foot taller than the three-foot Eventide.

Most asters are not known for being neat in their growth habits, but there are some dwarfs. Jenny forms 15 inch mounds that are covered with deep red flowers in September. Even smaller is Romany, a spreading variety, that gets no more than eight inches high and produces pretty rosy violet flowers.

No discussion about asters would be complete without mention of the champion Aster x trikarti 'Wonder of Staffa'. It is a dependable old variety that has strong 30-inch stems and lavender flowers fully two-and-a-half inches across. It's a real favorite



Pat Leuchtman
Between The Rows

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with many many gardeners because of its reliability and beauty, but I don't have it in my garden because of a purely personal prejudice against lavender flowers. In general I don't like pastels (Never? Well, hardly ever.) but I really dislike lavender.

This fall I moved a lavender-flowered rose of Sharon (hibiscus syriacus), not only because of the color of the flowers, but because I planted it much too close to other shrubs in the border.

One of the hardest tasks I have as a gardener is remembering how much room a mature plant will need at the time I plant it. Miscalculating doesn't cause too much trouble when you're talking about a few asters or phlox, but moving a shrub is work.

It can be done however. First I pruned the bush. I cut back the previous year's growth, a job that doesn't need to be done annually, although the flowers will ultimately get smaller and smaller unless the bush is pruned from time to time. Flowers are borne on new growth.

Before you begin, water the shrub well, preferably the day before. It's a good idea to dig a generous new hole at the same time. Digging up the shrub, moving it and replanting it are sufficient activities for one day in my household.

An established shrub should be dug up with a substantial root ball. Dig all around, at least 18 inches in every direction from the trunks. Dig down at least two feet. As you dig, cutting and loosening the roots, slip a plastic or burlap tarp under the root ball and then tie it around the trunk to hold the soil and roots in place. This will take two people.

Move the balled shrub carefully. Depending on the size of the bush, it can be very heavy. Keep it supported from beneath and place it in the new hole so that it will be planted at the same depth. Remove the tarp, make sure the shrub is firmly settled



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and fill it with soil. Tamp it down and water it as you work. Give it a final watering and keep it well watered and mulched until the ground is frozen.

My rose of Sharon is moved — and this time I really have allowed enough room for it to develop.

Sources: Thompson & Morgan (seeds) P.O. Box 1308, Jackson, NJ 08527; Wayside Gardens, Hodges, SC 29695-0001; White Flower Farm (\$5 catalogs for 1 year) Litchfield, CT 06759-0050.

Where do insects winter?

Garden — and vicinity — pests' choice vacation habitat

By KAREN IDOINE
UMass Cooperative Extension

Have you ever thought about where all the insects that plague or benefit us in the summer go in the winter? Insects have many strategies for protecting themselves from the harsh winter conditions. Monarch butterflies actually migrate, as birds do, to overwintering sites in the deep south and Mexico. After spending the winter in these well-defined areas, the same butterflies return north in the spring to feed and breed. It's hard to imagine a single, delicate butterfly capable of such a feat of endurance!

Many of the familiar insects that we encounter in our gardens spend the winter in or near the same gardens. They can also overwinter in various forms, or life stages, such as adults, pupae or eggs.

For instance, the cabbage maggot fly that attacks cole crops early in the season spends the winter in the soil within a small, oval, brown puparium. In the spring, as the soil warms and a certain temperature threshold is exceeded, the adult fly emerges from this protective covering, pushes its way through several inches of soil, dries its wings and begins to search for food, water and egg-laying sites on our newly transplanted cabbages, broccoli and radishes. Once the new larvae hatch from these eggs they begin to feed on the tender seedlings.

Another insect with a life cycle similar to the cabbage maggot fly is the pear thrips that caused so much damage to maple trees in our area this spring. After feeding on the tender buds and unfolding maple leaves, pear thrips larvae mature, fall to the ground and enter the soil where they mold tiny earthen cells in which to spend the next 10 months of both summer and winter. Sheltered in these cells, protected by several inches of soil and forest leaf litter, they will begin to emerge as adults just as the maple buds are swelling next spring.

Right now we don't know how many will emerge, or if the population will be as devastating as it was last spring. This will depend on the winter weather conditions and if some unknown natural enemy might find the overwintering thrips tasty. Potential natural enemies of overwintering insects are diseases, mites, other insects, and small mammals or amphibians.

An example of how a natural enemy can take advantage of the overwintering stage of an insect, and secure protection for itself at the same time, is that of the cecropia moth and its fly parasite. The big green caterpillar of the cecropia moth feeds on cherry, maple, willow and many other shrubs and trees. These caterpillars usually don't achieve pest status, perhaps because the fly that attacks them is an effective natural enemy. This fly lays eggs in the caterpillar before it spins the cocoon in which it prepares to overwinter. When the caterpillar finishes spinning its cocoon, the fly larvae begin to feed on the quiescent caterpillar. These fly larvae grow and complete their development within the cocoon that the caterpillar

unwittingly prepared for their winter shelter. Balmey spring weather will trigger the flies' emergence from the moth's cocoon.

Not all insects overwinter in cocoons or puparia. Some insects, such as the European corn borer, spend

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