

Symphyotrichum oblongifolium 'October Skies' (formerly *Aster oblongifolius*) | Aromatic Aster



Flower description / bloom time

October Skies is a selection of a native to the northeast and has masses of small [about one inch] soft lavender-blue daisy-like flowers with yellow centers that bloom late August into October.

Foliage interest / color and texture

The foliage is narrow creating a fine texture. The gray-green color is pleasing all summer and no powdery mildew was reported. Evaluators rated the foliage as good and praised it for its lack of disease issues. It is also aromatic when touched. In all but one site, this aster was not browsed by deer or rabbits.

Habit and growth rate observations

October Skies has a medium growth rate and is supposed to achieve mounds under two feet. But in some garden sites the plants became large masses approximately 30" x 45" – perhaps due to planting in overly rich soil [see site preference]. The habit tends to be a little floppy or sprawling by the end of the season. All plants survived except in one location where deer decimated the plants and they died out by year two.

Site preference / soil and light

Aromatic aster does best in full sun, with dry to average soils. Those grown in part shade or fertile, moist soils were more sprawling.

Successes and possible drawbacks – how to overcome them

The floppy late-season habit is a definite drawback. This could potentially be overcome by good pruning practices earlier in the season. Cutting the whole plant back by one-half around July 1 is suggested. Also, some evaluators rated this plant less floriferous and more sprawling by the third year. Other evaluators had better success with drier soil. Also, the blue flowers late in the season were judged a plus.

Notes from growers / retailers

Plugs were reported to finish in 4 to 5 weeks after rooting. To promote more compact growth, plants should be pruned or pinched by one half. Most growers reported that plants did over-winter in production but one grower did not have this success. Another grower reported that the plant was a prolific 're-seeder' – this was not reported by those who trialed the plant.

Best combinations

October Skies looks great with ornamental grasses and other late-season, sun perennials and also looks good in naturalized settings.

Parting "SHOT" –

the overall evaluation results were Good

While *Symphyotrichum oblongifolium* October Skies has its drawbacks, it still received a good overall rating for the profusion of flowers produced in fall. So with a little foreknowledge of soil and light preferences, a gardener should have success using this aster.

Evaluated 2003-2006

