

Blue Wood Aster and White Snakeroot

Beautiful Workhorse Plants for the Late Fall Garden

By Karalyn Lamb

Blue Wood Aster and White Snakeroot are problem-solver plants for difficult garden situations. Got dry shade? These plants thrive in dry shade **or** sun. Frustrated by deer browse? Both plants are highly deer-resistant - in fact they are some of the few native perennials still visible on roadsides and in natural areas. Plagued by weeds? Both Blue Wood Aster and White Snakeroot are robust, colonizing plants which resist competition from non-native invasives. They will seed themselves liberally around your garden - so they are best employed in wilder areas of your yard unless you can keep a close eye on their spreading tendencies. Both grow to approximately 3-4' tall but seldom flop over, and are well suited for grouping with other tall, spreading natives like Brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*) and Switchgrasses (*Panicum spp.*)



Best of all, **both plants are important late-season forage sources for a diversity of pollinators**, including Monarch butterflies fattening up for their 2,000 mile migration to Mexico (*top right: Monarch butterfly on White Snakeroot*).

More information on these plants and the amazing variety of pollinators they attract:

Blue Wood Aster (*Symphotrichum cordifolium*)

Asters are “superfoods” in the pollinator garden. As host plants for moths and butterflies, they are second only to the top-ranked Goldenrod genus; hosting 112 species of lepidoptera (including lovely Pearl Crescent butterflies). Asters also support 7 species of specialist bees which can only feed on aster pollen. Blue Wood Aster has a light, airy habit - the beautiful, arching sprays of bluish flowers have white centers which turn pink after pollination, as shown below left. This seems to serve as a cue; directing pollinators to the flowers which have not yet been visited.



Hoverflies are beneficial garden insects. Their larvae are important predators of pests such as aphids, scales and thrips.



Pure Green Sweat Bee. Gentle, solitary Sweat bees are attracted to the moisture and salt of human perspiration, but will not sting unless provoked.

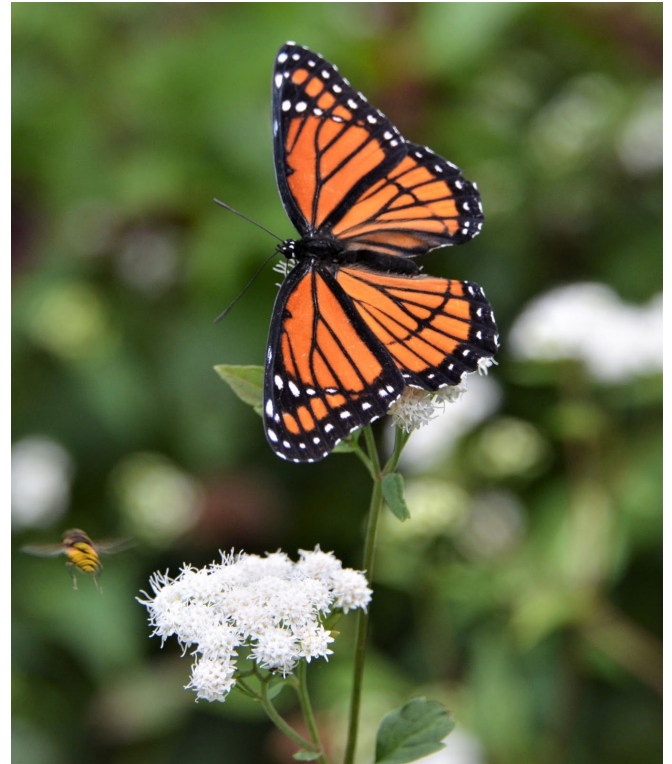
White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*)

White Snakeroot attracts a variety of insects; including bumble bees, wasps, beneficial flies, butterflies, and moths. Its fluffy white flowers brighten shady corners of the garden. A commercially available cultivar called 'Chocolate' has burgundy leaves; but 'Chocolate' will re-seed prodigiously, and in doing so will revert to straight-species green-leaved plants. To prevent the spread of seedlings, cut off dead flowers before they set seed.

White Snakeroot played an infamous role in American history, as "The Plant that Killed Abraham Lincoln's Mother." Snakeroot contains tremetol, a potent toxin evolved to prevent herbivores from consuming it - so best to keep leaf-eating children and pets away. In the nineteenth century, many settlers, including Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died from 'Milk Sickness,' when cows ingested enough White Snakeroot to produce toxic milk.



Blue-winged Wasp. These beneficial, non-aggressive wasps prey on the Japanese Beetle grubs that eat turfgrass roots.



Viceroy Butterfly. The similarity between this species and Monarch butterflies is thought to be an example of *Mullerian mimicry*, "A form of mimicry where two or more noxious animals develop similar appearances as a shared protective device." Viceroy's feed on willow species which contain salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin, which makes them taste bitter to predators. (www.saveourmonarchs.org)



Common Eastern Bumble Bee. Bumble bees have the amazing ability to "buzz pollinate," by vibrating their wing muscles so fast they literally shake pollen loose from flowers, making them super-efficient pollinators. Common eastern bumble bees are important pollinators of food crops like tomatoes, blueberries and cucumbers.