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**Common Name:** GEORGIA ASTER

**Scientific Name:** *Symphyotrichum georgianum* (Alexander) Nesom

**Other Commonly Used Names:** none

**Previously Used Scientific Names:** *Aster georgianus* Alexander, *Aster patens* Aiton var. *georgianus* (Alexander) Cronquist

**Family:** Asteraceae/Compositae (aster)

**Rarity Ranks:** G2G3/S2

**State Legal Status:** Threatened

**Federal Legal Status:** Candidate

**Federal Wetland Status:** none

**Description:** Perennial **herb** forming colonies by underground stems. **Stems** 20 - 40 inches (50 - 100 cm) tall, rough, hairy, with a few branches. **Leaves**  $\frac{3}{4}$  -  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches (2 - 7 cm) long and  $\frac{3}{8}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (1 - 2 cm) wide, alternate, thick, with rough hairs, pointed tips, and bases clasping the stem. **Flower heads** more than 2 inches (4 - 6 cm) wide, with bright purple **ray flowers**, reddish **disk flowers**, and purple-tipped stamens that produce white pollen. Four series of narrow green bracts, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (8 - 12 mm) high, form a cup (**involucre**) that surround the underside of the flower head; the bracts are covered with hairs and tiny glands. **Fruit** less than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (2.5 - 4 mm) long, dry, seed-like, and hairy.

**Similar Species:** Late purple aster (*Aster patens*, synonym: *Symphotrichum patens*) has much smaller heads with pale blue-purple ray flowers, yellow disk flowers, and yellow-tipped stamens; the involucre is less than ¼ inch (6 mm) high and, though hairy, lacks glands.

**Related Rare Species:** Piedmont bigleaf aster (*Eurybia jonesiae*, synonym: *Aster jonesiae*, Watch List) occurs on rocky ridges and in rich slope forests above large streams in 9 Piedmont counties. It has hairy stems, hairy leaves with toothed edges, heart-shaped lower leaves, and lance-shaped upper leaves. Flower heads are in a large, open cluster, with purple ray flowers and yellow disk flowers. Involucre bracts are hairy with spreading tips.

**Habitat:** Edges and openings in rocky, upland oak-hickory-pine forests, and rights-of-way through these habitats. Usually with circumneutral soils.

**Life History:** Georgia aster reproduces primarily by the spread of rhizomes, which send up new stems at the tips, forming colonies. The lack of sexual reproduction in the wild is not well understood but may be due to the fragmentation of populations. Since Georgia aster flowers require cross-pollination in order to set seed, and since most populations consist of clones of the same individual, there is little opportunity for cross-pollination. In cultivation, plants produce seeds which readily germinate.

**Survey Recommendations:** Surveys are best conducted during flowering (late September–mid-November).

**Range:** Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

**Threats:** Conversion of habitat to developments, pastures, highways, and pine plantations. Use of herbicides in roadside and utility rights-of-way. Invasion of habitat by exotic pest plants. Canopy closure and encroachment by woody plants.

**Georgia Conservation Status:** About 30 populations have been observed but only 15 small populations have survived; 8 of these occur in state parks or on national forest lands.

**Conservation and Management Recommendations:** Use prescribed fire or mowing in winter or early spring to create or maintain sunny openings. Avoid use of herbicides. Avoid clearcutting and soil disturbance. Eradicate exotic pest plant species. Protect sites from conversion to pine plantations or other developments.

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L.Chafin, Sep. 2008: original account

D.Weiler, Feb. 2010: added pictures

Z. Abouhamdan, April 2016: removed broken link



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