

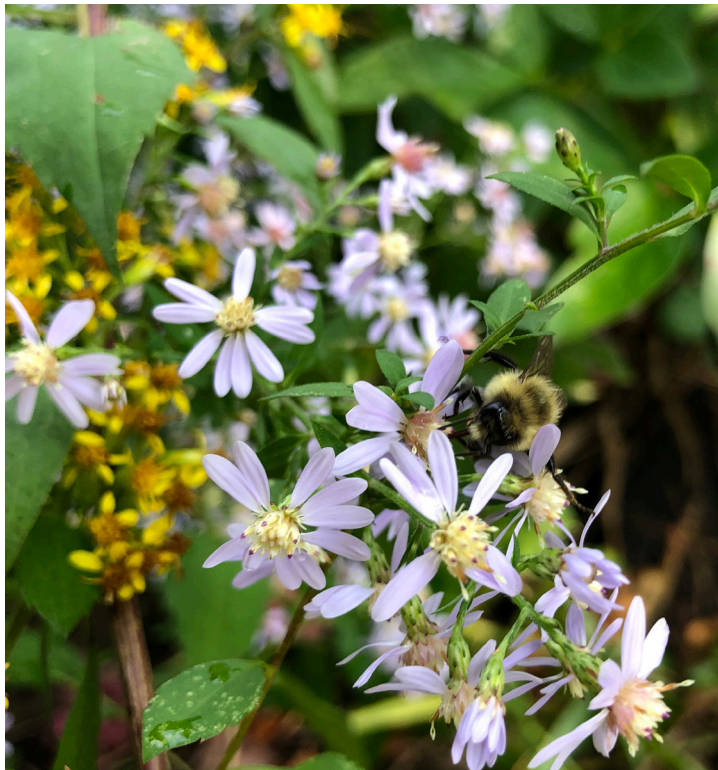
# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name:** Calico aster (*Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*)

**Plant family:** Aster (*Asteraceae*)

Calico asters' flower heads are yellow to purple with white rays. Bracts are appressed, lance-shaped and widest at the tip. Flowers have light yellow or rose-purple disks when they open.

**Photo Credits:**  
Metro Blooms



Like a calico cat, a calico aster has many colors. Flowers' centers, known as disks, can be yellow to rose-purple.

Flowers of different colors may bloom on one plant at the same time. Although it can grow up to 3 feet tall, calico aster can be a low-growing, flowering plant of bee lawns if it's mowed.

**Plant Stats**

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** FACW

**PRIMARY USES:**  
Fall pollinators' food source; woodland or shaded wetland habitat enhancement

## Uses

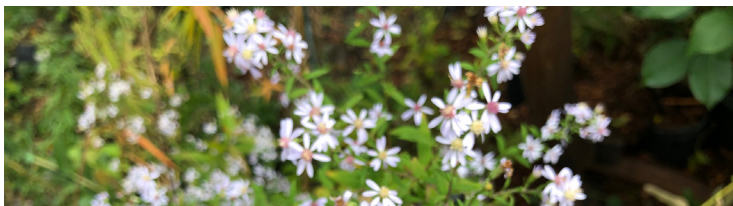
Calico aster is a source of nectar and pollen for a variety of bees, wasps, flies and other insects. Caterpillars of the

silvery checkerspot butterfly (*Chlosyne nycteis*) and pearl crescent butterfly (*Phyciodes tharos*) eat the leaves.

## Planting Recommendations

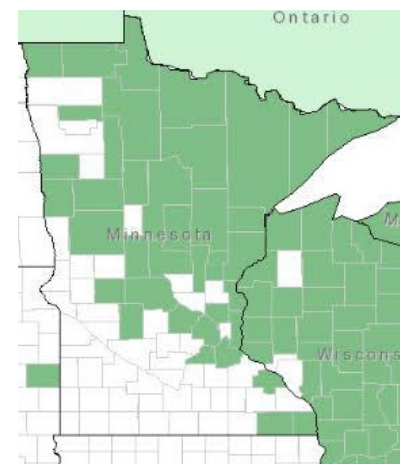
Calico aster is best suited to partial shade and moist soils. In ideal conditions, it can form

colonies from its rhizomes. In woodlands, it can appear lanky and delicate.



## Range

Calico aster is native to the eastern half of the United States and adjacent Canadian provinces. In Minnesota it is generally found in all but the southwest third of the state, typically in woodlands and other habitats with partial shade and moderately moist soil.



**Range map source:** USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Plants Database



**Left:** *Calico asters' flower heads are up to a half-inch wide, with eight to 16 rays. Photo Credit: Metro Blooms*  
**Middle:** *The branched stems are green or red, and usually hairy. Photo Credit: Susan Nelson*  
**Right:** *The elliptical leaves grow up to 6 inches long. Photo Credit: Brad Bolduan*

## Identification

Calico aster, AKA side-flowering aster, differs from the rest of Minnesota's 30-plus native aster species in that its floral disks may be yellow or purple when flowers first open. Other species may have yellow and purple disks, too, but

those turn purple only after the flowers open. Flower heads are a third-inch to a half-inch wide, with eight to 16 white or pale purple rays. Disk flowers are about an eighth-inch long with deep, flaring lobes. Bracts below the heads are

appressed, lance-shaped and widest at their green or purple tips. Flowers tend to grow on only one side of the branches. Calico aster blooms in late summer and early fall. The elliptic, lance-shaped or linear leaves grow up to 6 inches long

and 1.5 inches wide. Leaf size decreases farther up the stem. Hairy midribs are found on the undersides. The branched stems grow 1 to 3 feet long. They're green or red, often leaning and usually hairy.

## Similar Species

Other asters with small white flowers include heath asters (*Symphyotrichum ericoides*) and panicked asters (*Symphyotrichum*

*lanceolatum*). Only calico asters have disk flowers with deep, flaring lobes and leaves with prominent hairs on the midrib. (The hairs are visible

with a magnifying lens.) Heath asters also differ in having blunt, often spreading bracts with white bases and linear leaves less than a quarter-inch

wide. Panicked asters have 20 to 40 rays per flower and narrow, spreading bracts. Their leaves have short hairs only along the edges.

## References

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=SYLA4>  
 Flora of the Great Plains. Great Plains Flora Association. 1986. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence.  
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 Illinois Wildflowers: [https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/savanna/plants/calico\\_aster.htm](https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/savanna/plants/calico_aster.htm)  
 Wetland Plants of Minnesota. Steve W. Chadde. Second edition (revised), 2012. A Bogman Guide.