

Stokesia laevis (Stokes Aster)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 12-18"
Foliage Width: 12-18"
Flower Height: 18-24"
Foliage Color: Green
Flower Color: Lavender-Blue
USDA Hardiness: 5-9
Moisture: Average-Moist
Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



Native to the southeastern United States, *Stokesia laevis* ranges from South Carolina down to Florida and west to Louisiana. Stokes Aster grows in open woodlands, bogs, and wet flat woods areas.

Its natural habitat would lead you to believe it needs a lot of moisture to thrive. Actually too much water, especially in the winter, will cause a quick death of this floral beauty. Preferred soils are slightly acidic while being average to moist and well drained.

The basal leaves are a nice dark green and evergreen, adding interest year round unless covered by snow. The stems rising from the basal foliage will reach one to two feet tall before ending in a uniquely wonderful lavender-blue flower that is generally 2-3 inches wide. These stems are excellent as long-lasting cut flowers.

Stokes Aster is a great addition to any sunny butterfly garden. It is a favored nectar source of small and large butterflies alike. Skippers, American Painted Lady, and Swallowtails are some of the beautiful flutterbys that you might see visiting this gorgeous garden member.

Rabbits and deer find this plant unappetizing and generally ignore it. Stokes Aster is normally pest and disease free although a few leaf spots may occasionally be seen in the home garden.

A unique quality of this perennial is that it produces vernolic acid in its seeds. It's possible that this acid could be used in the production of plastics, varnishes, and adhesives. Experiments continue, but at this time a commercially viable process to extract the oil has not been found.

Stokesia laevis is named after Dr. Jonathan Stokes, a writer and botanist of the early 19th century. There is evidence of this perennial being used in gardens as far back as 1757 in England. Even though this is an old tried-and-true species, it is only now beginning to be rediscovered by gardeners.

Stokes Aster has been a well-kept secret of gardening for over 250 years. Its unique flowers coupled with its butterfly-attracting ability create a combination that all gardeners will be able to enjoy.