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GARDENING WITH THE MASTERS | JODI MORGAN

GARDENING WITH THE MASTERS: Late season wildflower pollinator plants for your garden

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Conoclinium coelestinum, blue mistflower.

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As summer begins to wind down and the summer plants begin to fade, there are a few plants you can add to your landscape to prolong enjoyable blooms. Asters and Blue Mistflower are varieties of late summer/early fall-blooming plants. Pollinators depend on

late summer/early fall-blooming plants to build up their food reserves for the winter months. Asters and Blue Mistflower are referred to as wildflowers. While they are both in the Asteraceae family, the similarity between these two plants ends at the family level.

Asters resemble a tiny daisy bloom, the bloom smaller than the tip of your finger. The proper name of asters is Aster. Asters come in white, purple, blue, and pink. The center is yellow. Asters have a weedy appearance. They have tall, thin stalks and sparse green leaves. Asters are perennial. They are native to Georgia. Asters love the sun and are deer resistant. Asters are a low-maintenance plant.

Asters are a larval host for the Pearl crescent and Gorgone checkerspot caterpillar. Asters also support the Northern flower moth. Bees and other pollinators use asters for pollen. There are 170 species of asters worldwide. Twenty-one is native to North America. Twelve are found in Georgia.

Blue Mistflower is also considered a wildflower in the same family as Asters, Asteraceae. These two plants have little else in common. The proper name for Blue Mistflower is *Conoclinium coelestinum*. Blue Mistflower has fuzzy tufts of blue-violet flowers. The flower heads are unlike other native flower heads. Some people think the flower heads resemble spiders as dainty filaments extend up from the actual flower head.

Blue Mistflowers enjoy full sun. They are deer resistant. They are prolific growers, so yearly thinning is required. Blue Mistflower has a bush-like appearance. There are only three species worldwide. The leaves are green and opposite from each other. The leaf shape is triangular. They are a perennial, so they come back every year, sometimes in the least expected places.

Insects attracted to Blue Mistflower include the spotted cucumber beetle, skippers, little yellow butterflies, and buckeye butterflies. Birds and several species of bees are also attracted to the plant. Blue Mistflower is a wonderful pollinator plant. Blue Mistflower and white Woodland Aster create a symphonic appearance when paired together in your

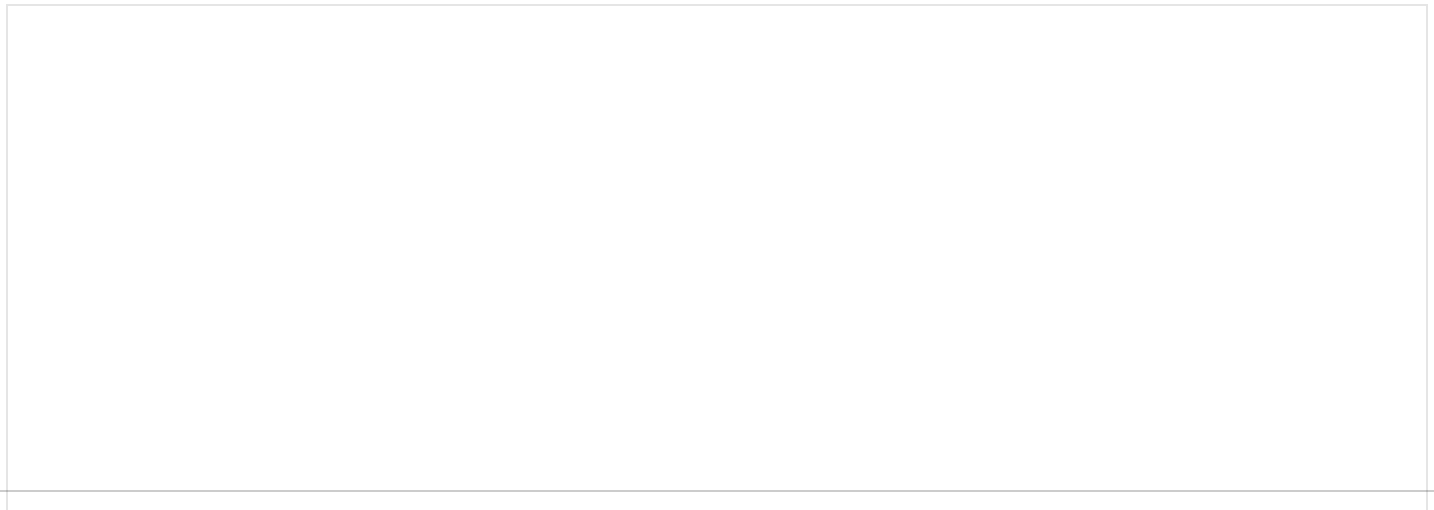
wildflower garden bed. Both Blue Mistflower and Asters are late summer bloomers. They provide nectar for the last summer batch of bees, butterflies, and birds. Blue Mistflower and Asters usually bloom in the August-September period in Georgia.

UGA Extension hosts a pollinator census every year. This year's Great Georgia Pollinator Census (GGAPC) takes place Aug. 19-20. The Cherokee County Master Gardeners are hosting two locations for the GGAPC. Our first location is the Cherokee County Senior Center on Univeter Road. Cherokee County Master Gardeners are going to be at the Senior Center both Friday, Aug. 19, and Saturday, Aug. 20, from 10 a.m. to noon.

The second location is at Veteran's Park at the Backyard Agriculture Education Station next to the tennis courts. Cherokee County Master Gardeners will be available Saturday, Aug. 20, 10 a.m. to noon. This event is free, join us! If you can't join us, visit the GGAPC website at <https://ggapc.org>. The Great Georgia Pollinator Census can be done at your house, in a local park, or anywhere there are plants. This is a great educational STEM activity. Learn how to recognize bees, butterflies, and birds. Watch these pollinators for 15 minutes. Notice their movements. Tally how many you see. What other observations can you make? Your participation in this event assists local pollinator scientists.

Jodi Morgan is one of many UGA Master Gardener Extension Volunteers of Cherokee County. For more information or questions, contact the Cherokee County Extension Office at 770-721-7803 or for upcoming seminars follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/cherokeemastergardeners or cherokeemastergardeners.com.

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