

Some Additional Material on Aster Flower Color Changes

For those wanting to explore our local asters, a good field guide to flowers is useful, as is the Go Botany web site: <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/genus/symphyotrichum/> .

Note: Older books put our asters in the genus *Aster*; more recent references refer to most North American species as “American-asters” and place them in the genus *Symphyotrichum*. There are many species of asters locally, and identification to species can be challenging.

For those wanting to explore the scientific literature on flower color change, the classic review article by Weiss is a good place to start:

Weiss, Martha R. 1993. Floral color change: a widespread functional convergence. *American Journal of Botany* 82 (No. 2, February 1995):167-185.

The *Cape Cod Wildflowers* guide describes “the golden color of disk flowers, which turn bronze with age.” I don’t know which coauthor is responsible for the metals.

DiGregorio, Mario J., and Jeff Wallner. 2003. *Cape Cod Wildflowers: A Vanishing Heritage*. University Press of New England, Lebanon, New Hampshire. p. 68.

The observation that aster disk florets change color is not new, although serious research on the phenomenon is relatively recent. In 1843 botanist John Torrey described aster disk florets as “yellow, often changing to purple.”

In 1850 naturalist Susan Fenimore Cooper said that Michaelmas daisies’ (an old name for asters) “hearts [i.e., disk florets] vary also in color, even upon the same plants, according to the age of the different flowers, the centre being either yellow, dark reddish purple, or pale green; and this enlivens the clusters very much.” (The word “magenta” that I use was not used as the name of a color until a decade later.)

Cooper, Susan Fenimore. 1850. *Rural Hours*. Putnam, New York. 1998 reprint edited by Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson. University of Georgia Press, Athens. p. 175.

Torrey, John. 1843. *A flora of the State of New-York, comprising full descriptions of all the indigenous and naturalized plants hitherto discovered in the state; with remarks on their economical and medicinal properties*. Carroll and Cook, Printers to the Assembly, Albany. p. 334. <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/91278#page/358/mode/1up>

Emily Dickinson’s quote is from the poem that starts “It will be Summer — eventually.” The poem is number 342 in Johnson’s listing of Dickinson’s poems and number 374 in Franklin’s listing. Dickinson’s manuscript is at https://www.edickinson.org/editions/5/image_sets/85779 .