



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article      May 21, 2018

### A Colorful Choice: Stokes' Aster by Lydia Holley

Are you looking for an evergreen plant that blooms in early summer and comes in several colors? Stokes' aster (*Stokesia laevis*) may just be the plant you are wanting.

Native to the US, from North Carolina to Louisiana, Stokes' aster grows well in East Texas' slightly acidic, sandy soils, as long as they are well watered. You will want to place them fairly near the front of your garden bed, as they only grow from 1 to 2 ft tall, with a spread around 1.5 ft.



Do not be in a rush in the morning to go out and look at your Stokes' aster blooms—they close at night and open to a wide 3 to 4 inch bloom during the day. Around mid-morning throughout the afternoon, Stokes' aster will attract numerous pollinators.

In East Texas, Stokes' aster can be grown in full sun or part shade. It comes in a variety of colors, mostly in the purple to white range. The most commonly found color is a light lavender with a bluish tint and a white center. Pair these with pastels, medium-saturated colors, or other blue or purple blooms.

The all-white cultivar 'Alba' looks lovely in a moon garden, or paired with pastels. This cultivar could also be very striking mixed with red, and would be stunning in front of 'Hot Lips' salvia. If you want a white Stokes' aster with a different color in the center, try 'Divinity'. Its white petals surround a yellow center.

One of the darkest colored Stokes' aster is 'Honeysong Purple'. It has dark violet flower petals surrounding a pure white center. It complements plants with more vibrant hues, such as red, orange, or bright yellows, although you could also pair it with other purples and blues.

Not interested in purple or white? Dark pink cultivars, and even a yellow blooming cultivar, 'Mary Gregory', have been in trials, and will hopefully be widely available to the home gardener soon.

Once you have Stokes' aster in your garden, you are bound to have more to place around other areas of your garden, or to give away as gifts, because they multiply in clumps, which are easily divided. Another advantage of this plant is that in East Texas, Stokes' aster stays evergreen.

Although the leaves of Stokes' aster may not look as fresh in winter as they do in spring, it is nice to see plants that retain a shape in winter (other than a stick) and do not disappear under the ground. Not only do evergreens add form to the the winter garden, they are valuable to the inexperienced gardener who can not tell the difference between an emerging perennial and a weed, because they will not be pulled by mistake.

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