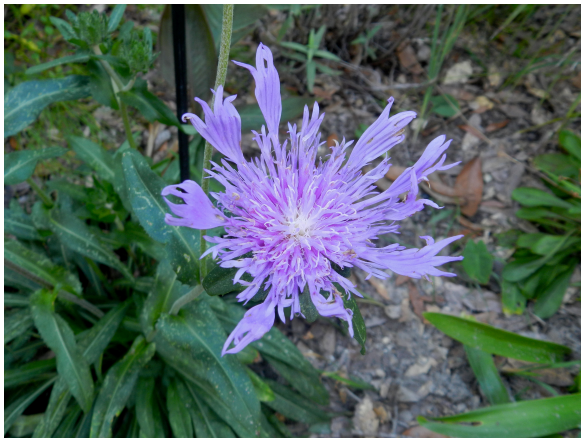


Horticulture Hints

"If you've never experienced the joy of accomplishing more than you can imagine, plant a garden." – Robert Brault

November 2021

November 1 came upon us, and my Stoke's aster decided to put out a whole new flush of flowers. This is a lovely native flower that I purchased (actually bought two) at our Annual Plant Sale last spring. I babied them

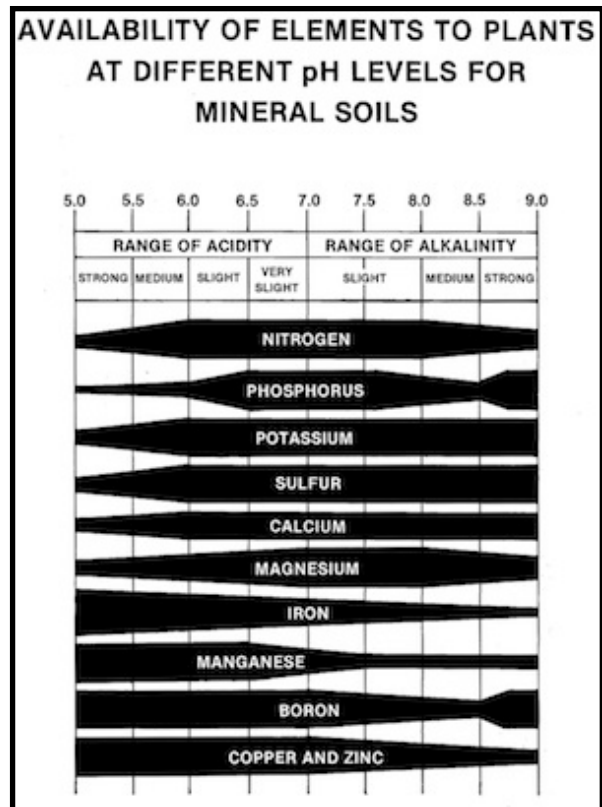


Stoke's Aster Flower (1 of a dozen!)

all through the summer, making sure they had plenty of water in native soil (aka beach sand at my house). They bloomed wonderfully at the mid-summer mark, and continued to look nice with its rosette of ground-hugging lanceolate leaves. And then, lo and behold, a whole new crop of shaggy, purple-blue, daisy-type flowers show up this fall. Probably because of our prolonged fall warmth. But I'll take it. I've also noticed some azaleas are giving us a fall flush of blooms. But I digress...I'll definitely put more of these lovely things into my yard. I have found that the green part of the plant doesn't photograph well, but the flowers photograph amazingly well. Also, just for your information, they are considered 'semi-evergreen'. The rosette of leaves will usually stay green through the winter, even though blooms are absent. They are native to the

southeastern United States, from North Carolina to Florida, zones 8-11. They prefer full sun, well-drained soil, and are nectar sources for bees, butterflies, and lots of other pollinators. There are cultivars available in several shades of purple-blue, as well as shades of white and pink. There's even one that opens up white, then changes (I can't say 'fades') to purple as it ages. And, to make it all better, the plant is drought tolerant once established. Can you ask for more?

Speaking of blooms and no blooms, this subject has started me looking into fertilizers and soil pH. Wow, can that get complicated! Fertilizers, I have a little bit of a handle on. Or at least I know what each of the numbers mean. And a little bit about how each



number affects the garden. But getting into pH - well, that can lead to a number (that's a pun, folks) of rabbit trails, offshoots and confusion. For me, at least. Studying pH was not one of those things that stuck very well when I was in school. I know that vinegar is acidic, and baking soda is alkaline, and when you mix the two, you get a fun little volcano. But beyond that...well, at least now I know that every five to six years, getting a soil test is necessary. If you want to grow stuff in your soil. And that certain plants, like blueberries, azaleas, and pine trees like their feet to be in slightly acidic soil. Not sure yet if anything likes to be in alkaline soil. But I plan to get my soil tested (both native and raised bed), and you'll be the first to know the results (after me, of course!). This chart was taken from the savvygardening.com website. They have a lot of good information! I'll have more on soil pH in the next few months.

In my research concerning weeds, I find that this is again, a very complex subject. But I ran into this bit of advice at a University of Florida website (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP523>) that says, "An effective non-chemical method of reducing annual weed pressure is to repeatedly till, allow weeds to germinate, and then hoe or till again. This process works by essentially depleting the weed seed bank in the upper layers of the soil surface. Each time the area is tilled and small weeds are allowed to germinate, the amount of weed seeds lying dormant in the soil can be reduced." This seems to me to be a good strategy for larger areas that are going to become specific beds, i.e. a new annual bed, ornamental bed, or garden plot. I believe I may try this in the next bed I'm planting.

Happy November, and happy gardening!