

Symphotrichum laeve **Margaret Stone**

I am writing in the second week of August; it is hot and dry and has been that way since early June, with insufficient rain and little forecast. I have spent hours watering vegetables and plants in pots but some parts of the garden have not been visited by the hose. There are many dead-looking plants and the time spent watering elsewhere means that I have had little for weeding. From this sad state, what lessons can be learned for the future? *Phlox* and *Crocsmia* need to be planted in areas easily watered and I am reconsidering where to place two hydrangeas (which are still in pots).

Amid the “straw”, some healthy green leaves persist and I am surprised that they include asters. They are mainly forms of *Symphotrichum laeve*, particularly ‘Les Moutiers’, which were brought back from a visit to France. Usually five feet tall, it is about three feet now, with good dark green foliage. When they come, the flowers will be a mix of mauve, pink and white, borne in generous sprays on dark stems. The diameter is normally 2cm.

This year many flowers have been smaller than usual (e.g. *Leucanthemums*) but I hope there will be sufficient rain before autumn for the aster flowers to develop. I have a large (too large!) clump of a white form, which I obtained, incorrectly named, from an HPS plant stall many years ago. It flowers late and, although a “traveller”, I would not be without it. There is also dark blue ‘Orpheus’, which is less vigorous than I would like, and paler ‘Climax’. A plant bought incorrectly as ‘Arcturus’ is another invader and an attractive mauve-blue. Brian Ellis’s ‘Glow in the Dark’ is similar in colouring to ‘Les Moutiers’ but the flowers are larger and it does not run as much. Sadly, I have lost a few other *S. laeve* in the past; perhaps the soil was too wet for them?

My collection of *Symphotrichum novae-angliae* has survived the drought well, most having no extra watering. They are shorter than usual and have not put on the lush growth which would have suffered if the dry weather started later. I am looking forward to a colourful autumn!



Symphotrichum laeve ‘Les Moutiers’, 27.9.2017



Symphotrichum laeve white-flowered, 23.10.2016