

Unusual Asteraceae in Maryland



Fig. 1 Grass-leaved Golden-aster (*Pityopsis graminifolia* var. *latifolia*) flower head. Photo by R.H. Simmons.

Grass-leaved Golden-aster (*Pityopsis graminifolia* var. *latifolia*) is a striking plant, at least as much for the silvery, silky-pubescent, dense patches of narrow-lanceolate leaves as for the small, bright yellow flowers in August through October. The older common name for this plant—reflecting the distinctive foliage—is “Silkgrass” (Brown and Brown 1984).

Pityopsis: “A genus of about 13 taxa (variously recognized at species or varietal rank), perennial herbs, of se. North America south to Central America. *Pityopsis* is taxonomically and nomenclaturally difficult. The problems include species and varietal concepts in a morphologically and cytologically diverse group, nomenclatural issues involving typification and application (and frequently misapplication) of a plethora of names at specific and varietal ranks...” (Weakley and

by **R.H. SIMMONS**

Southeastern Flora Team 2022).

According to the 2022 Weakley Flora, the correct name for what was formerly called “*Pityopsis graminifolia* var. *latifolia*”—and earlier “*Chrysopsis graminifolia*”—is *Pityopsis nervosa*: “A number of prominent researchers seem to have somewhat different interpretations of the *Pityopsis graminifolia* complex. Although there have been a lot of chromosome counts done, there haven’t been any molecular studies which could clear up some of the phylogenetic confusion” (Gary Fleming, pers. comm.). Nonetheless, the Flora of the Southeastern United States (2022) provides excellent keys to the *Pityopsis* genus as currently circumscribed.

Grass-leaved Golden-aster is near the northern limits of its natural range

in Maryland. Its northernmost station is the Coastal Plain of southern New Jersey, while it is historic for Delaware (Weakley and Southeastern Flora Team 2022).

The Maryland Biodiversity Project gives the state’s distribution of Grass-leaved Golden-aster as outer and inner Coastal Plain: “Common in sand hill habitats that border the Pocomoke River and Nassawango Creek regions of Worcester and Wicomico counties. Uncommon in sandy interior habitats of Anne Arundel and Prince George’s counties.”

The inner Coastal Plain habitats are infrequent on Maryland’s Western Shore, occurring in deep Cretaceous-aged sands of globally rare pine barrens communities at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) to the east in northern Prince George’s and Anne Arundel counties, Maryland (Simmons et al. 2008).

An October 4, 2003 specimen was also collected by Brent Steury from a “dry sandy meadow between the Patuxent River and Patuxent River Road, south of [Governor] Bridge Road” northwest of Davidsonville, Anne Arundel County, Maryland. This and an August 19, 2000 collection by Mark Strong from BARC East Farm pine barrens along Beaver Dam Road comprise the sum of Maryland’s Western Shore specimens of Grass-leaved Golden-aster at the United States National Herbarium (US), Smithsonian Institution.

Pineland Golden-aster (*Pityopsis aspera* var. *adenolepis*), also a plant of sandy soils in Maryland, is much rarer this far north and is only known in Maryland from St. Mary’s County from a single sheet of an old E.H. Walker collection in the DC Herbarium collection at US: *Pityopsis aspera* (Shuttlw. ex Small) Small var. *adenolepis* (Fern.) Semple & Bowers, *E.H. Walker* 3930, 30 Aug 1945,

“near ‘Christmas Hill’, 2.2 m. bearing 304 degrees from St. Mary; roadside through pine woods, St. Mary’s County, Maryland”. This specimen was examined and determined as *Heterotheca adenolepis* (Fern.) Ahles by John C. Semple in April 1978 and represents the northernmost station known for this taxon in the eastern U.S.

This specimen was later examined and annotated as *Pityopsis aspera* var. *adenolepis* by R.H. Simmons on September 26, 2016, merely a nomenclatural update. It was reexamined by Simmons on February 13, 2023, which again confirmed Semple’s original determination.

The Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora cites this species for Northumberland County on Virginia’s Northern Neck just opposite the Potomac River from St. Mary’s County, Maryland and south of the similar Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*) woodlands of the area near Drayden between the St. Mary’s River and Tall Timbers

(Virginia Botanical Associates 2023).

A good reminder of why it is best not to move plant genotypes around, especially from hundreds of miles away and from different physiographic regions, is a reporting from the late 2000s of a Grass-leaved Golden-aster breeding program on BARC grounds at the Norman A. Berg National Plant Materials Center (NPMC) in Beltsville, Maryland: “The NPMC had wild collected seeds in the mountains of Tennessee. The resulting cultivar was very aggressive, escaped NPMC grounds, and was found growing along roadsides in the area. I recall it more because of the politics of the situation, where the federal employees that worked at NPMC were debating whether or not the program should be stopped and the escaped plants treated with herbicide” (Sara Tangren, pers. comm.).

Destroying the anthropomorphically caused, aggressive non-native plants and



Fig. 2. Grass-leaved Golden-aster (*Pityopsis graminifolia* var. *latifolia*) at edge of globally rare Pine Barrens Pine - Oak Woodland: *Pinus rigida* - *Quercus coccinea* - *Quercus falcata* / (*Quercus marilandica*) / *Gaylussacia frondosa* Woodland (USNVC: CEGLo06329) on the East Farm at BARC. Photo by R.H. Simmons.



Fig. 3. Pineland Golden-aster (*Pityopsis aspera* var. *adenolepis*). Photo by Gary P. Fleming.

abandoning the Grass-leaved Golden-aster breeding program may well have been the outcome, as no record of it is found in NPMC literature. If so, kudos to NPMC staff for adhering to the chief tenet of ecological restoration: Do No Harm.

As to any concerns that the Western Shore occurrences of Grass-leaved Golden-

aster are all escapes from the NPMC breeding program, the abundance of collections and observations over the past 25 years or so from stations throughout eastward sandy regions of Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties, some quite a distance away, dispels that scenario. Three well-established populations of Grass-

leaved Golden-aster are documented for the PRR North Tract in Anne Arundel County (Bill Harms, pers. comm.), several thriving populations have been noted at the PRR South Tract, many patches are known from the BARC East Farm, including interior sections (Fig. 2), as well as the above cited specimens.

LITERATURE CITED

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Wild Ones native plant swap.
Photo by Dan Chew.

Wild Ones new to Maryland

Wild Ones is a national organization promoting gardening practices that support our native wildlife. The original Wild Ones was inspired by the work of Lorrie Otto, who helped to establish the US' ban on DDT and the Environmental Defense Fund. Following on from Lorrie's pioneering cries to abandon traditional mowed lawn, Wild Ones today focuses on the preservation, restoration, and establishment of native plant communities.

Four years ago, there were no Wild Ones Chapters in Maryland. This inspired Carol Chew, a friend of Lorrie's, to establish the first Maryland Wild Ones Chapter—the Nation's Capital Wild Ones (originally Chesapeake Wild Ones) with the help of longtime Wild One's member-at-large Marney Bruce. There are now two additional chapters, one in Baltimore and the other on the Chesapeake Bay shore. Wild Ones focuses primarily on gardening with natives, with a goal of getting more landowners to plant and grow native species.

Here at the Nation's Capital Chapter, we have a vibrant and welcoming community—about 90 members strong, primarily from Montgomery County, but open to anyone in Maryland. We hold monthly programs and in warmer weather, we visit members' gardens, wander about, and chat about the trials and tribulations of native gardening.

There is usually some form of plant exchange at these gatherings. This winter, we have been lucky enough to meet on the grounds of Glenstone Museum in Potomac for presentations and discussions on topics such as native plant cultivars and wildlife corridors. But the highlight of the year, is our native plant swaps, held twice a year. If the thought of sharing your local natives and getting other local natives fills you with excitement, do get in touch. <https://wildones.org/chapters/>