



# Chicagoland Grows®, Inc.



## Plant Introduction Program – Plant Release Bulletin #55

### Chicagoland Grows®, Inc., presents a collection of four aster selections

Chicagoland Grows® is proud to present a new set of four aster cultivars, each with an abundance of flowers sure to provide late-season appeal to any garden. 'Billowing Pink' and 'Billowing Violet' are sister hybrid cultivars of *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae* and *S. oblongifolium* that each form a dense mound and provide a bright display of pink or violet flowers, as suggested by their names. 'Cotton Candy' is an *S. oblongifolium* cultivar and a parent of 'Billowing Pink' and 'Billowing Violet'. It forms a larger mound than its progeny cultivars and has light pink-violet flowers. Lastly, 'Bridal Veil' is likely an *S. ericoides* selection that presents a wealth of small white flowers on a cascading habit, making it an elegant and effective ground cover. All four cultivars are resistant to rust and powdery mildew, and only 'Bridal Veil' succumbs to occasional deer or rabbit predation. These cultivars all bloom in early fall, providing interest when other perennials have retired for the year. As such, these asters should have a place in any sunny, well-drained garden to provide one last display of color before winter arrives.



[chicagolandgrows.org](http://chicagolandgrows.org)



***Symphotrichum* 'Billowing Pink' PP32,556**

'Billowing Pink' takes on a compact, dense mound habit as it develops. Two-year-old in-ground plants were 11 inches tall and 18 inches wide, while four-year-old in-ground plants were 26 inches tall and 48 inches wide, giving this cultivar a moderate size suitable for the middle of perennial beds. It can completely cover large areas when several plants are massed together. Inflorescences are pink in color, 1½ inches in diameter, and cover the entire plant in peak bloom. Ray florets along the edge of the flower heads begin strongly upturned and remain somewhat upturned during flowering. 'Billowing Pink' has a six-week bloom period from late September to mid-November in USDA Zone 5.

**Height: 30 inches Spread: 48 inches**



***Symphotrichum* 'Billowing Violet' PP32,557**

As a full-sibling cultivar to 'Billowing Pink', 'Billowing Violet' shares several of the same characteristics but with some minor key differences. It also has a dense mound habit, with three-year-old plants reaching a height of 25 inches and a width of 43 inches and some four-year-old plants reaching a height of 22 inches and a width of 60 inches. It can therefore grow slightly shorter and wider than 'Billowing Pink', but the two cultivars have appeared highly similar in size in trials at the Garden. Inflorescences are violet, 1¾ inches across, and completely cover plants in peak bloom. 'Billowing Violet' also has a roughly six-week bloom period, though this occurs earlier than 'Billowing Pink', running from early September to mid-October in USDA Zone 5.

**Height: 30 inches Spread: 48 inches**



***Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*, 'Cotton Candy' PP34,580**

'Cotton Candy' has a larger, broader mounding habit than its progeny cultivars 'Billowing Pink' and 'Billowing Violet', with three-year-old in-ground plants growing to 28 inches tall and 48 inches wide and four-year-old in-ground plants growing to 33 inches tall and 63 inches wide. It will therefore require slightly greater spacing and may be more suitable toward the back of perennial beds. The inflorescences are a light pink-violet color, 1½ inches in diameter, and cover plants completely during peak bloom. The six-week bloom period of 'Cotton Candy' is intermediate between its progeny cultivars, lasting from mid-September to late October in USDA Zone 5.

**Height: 36 inches Spread: 60 inches**



***Symphyotrichum* 'Bridal Veil' PP23,066**

'Bridal Veil' differs from the three previously highlighted aster cultivars. Its dense stems transition from arching to pendulous during the growing season, resulting in a graceful weeping habit by the time it blooms. It can therefore be planted closer to the front of perennial beds and drapes over curbs with poise. The inflorescences of 'Bridal Veil' are white, petite (½-inch in diameter), and highly abundant, completely covering plants during peak bloom and providing a regal presence to garden borders. Its bloom period is the same as that of 'Cotton Candy', beginning in mid-September and ending in late October in USDA Zone 5.

**Height: 24 inches Spread: 54 inches**

## Family

Asteraceae (Aster family)

## Origin

‘Bridal Veil’ was the first aster cultivar developed by Jim Ault, Ph.D., resulting from a cross made in 2002 using heath aster (*Symphoricarpos ericoides*) as the seed parent. While intended to be an interspecific cross, ‘Bridal Veil’ shows no traits correlating to other putative parent species and is therefore likely a straight *S. ericoides* cultivar. In 2008, a more formal aster improvement program was initiated at the Chicago Botanic Garden using cultivars of aromatic aster (*S. oblongifolium*) and New England aster (*S. novae-angliae*) that performed well in the plant evaluation program’s trials along with other promising selections. Breeding of aromatic aster (*S. oblongifolium*) resulted in the cultivar ‘Cotton Candy’, which was subsequently used as the seed parent in crosses made in September 2012 with pooled pollen of hybrid origin. This cross led to the development of the cultivars ‘Billowing Pink’ and ‘Billowing Violet’.

## Hardiness

‘Billowing Pink’, ‘Billowing Violet’, and ‘Cotton Candy’ are hardy in USDA Zones 4-8, while ‘Bridal Veil’ is hardy in USDA Zones 5-8.

## Culture

These four cultivars, like most asters, grow best in full sun and well-drained soils and are drought tolerant once established. They do not require staking and should take on a mounding or weeping habit on their own. These cultivars therefore require very little maintenance as they grow vegetatively during the summer and bloom during the fall. Dead stems from the previous year can be pruned back in early spring.

## Pest/Disease Issues

All four cultivars exhibit excellent resistance to both rust and powdery mildew. ‘Billowing Pink’, ‘Billowing Violet’, and ‘Cotton Candy’ also exhibit resistance to lace bug predation. Because the foliage of these three cultivars is sticky and releases medicine-scented aromatics when crushed, they are resistant to deer and rabbit predation. ‘Bridal Veil’ is susceptible to occasional deer and rabbit browsing, as is typical of *S. ericoides* selections.

## Propagation

Shoot tip cuttings taken from vegetative growth in June in USDA Zone 5 have been the most consistent and efficient method of propagation. To optimize this method, cuttings are treated with 1,000 ppm K-IBA for 5 seconds and placed in a medium of two parts perlite and one part peat. Cuttings are then stuck in a 72-cell tray or other small pots and placed in a fog house with bottom heat set to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Once plants in the field are large enough, they can also be propagated through division.

## Ornamental Characteristics/Landscape Value

A variety of traits make these cultivars useful for different purposes. All cultivars form dense masses of flowers, making them effective ground covers, especially when planted in mass. In addition, due to its cascading habit, ‘Bridal Veil’ can be used in various landscapes to drape over rocks, walls, and slopes. Because these cultivars have such a late bloom season—lasting well into fall—they provide appeal once most other perennials have subsided for the year. The nectar and seeds produced by asters are a source of subsistence for pollinators and other wildlife and are therefore beneficial for local ecosystems. These cultivars would therefore make a fine addition to native gardens as well as prairie and meadow settings.

Chicagoland Grows® is a nonprofit corporation of the Chicago Botanic Garden, The Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois (OGA). The Chicagoland Grows® Plant Introduction Program is dedicated to the evaluation, selection, production, and marketing of recommended and new plant cultivars. Plants selected for the program have proven to be adaptable to the Midwest and are made available to the commercial and retail landscape industry through an international network of growers and propagators. ©2022 Chicago Botanic Garden

Cover photos: Aster ‘Cotton Candy’ (top), Aster ‘Bridal Veil’ (bottom)