



*Before late bonesets florets open they look like tiny round cotton balls. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.*

## **Autumn Bloomer**

*Late boneset is a native pollinator that adds to the aesthetics of the garden with its blossoms, August to October.*

By J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

For a number of years we've had a *eupatorium* in the more naturalized portion

of our property. Despite the abundant seeds that it produces only one plant prevails, and although it can grow from rhizomes it has remained a single stalk. The lifespan is said to be four -11 years and I estimate it has been there for over six years.

This year it managed to make a leap to the garden in the front of the house with about six plants distributed here and there. I suppose we have a bird to thank for the plantings. If we lived in a formal neighborhood our neighbors might be horrified by the vast array of native plants that often have a bedraggled appearance in our yard, but the view of our property is obscured by a wooded patch and we have the benefit of seeing lots of insects and wildlife because we are hosting indigenous flora which support native fauna.

I often encourage people who want to embark on a native garden to start with native plants that are more familiar to the people in their area. Some neighborhoods balk at anything that is not a mowed lawn and exotic plants, but most nonnative flora species offer no habitat benefits, and may as well be plastic plants. Additionally, the products employed to maintain that overly-tidy yard are often polluting our water supplies. I suggest converting some lawn to beneficial plants each year; in short course

you will notice your property becomes more vibrant with pollinators, butterflies, and birds.

Is our yard free of non-native and invasive species? No, but we always strive to do better. Exotic species will keep showing up in the landscape because birds, wind, and water will all continue to bring unwanted volunteers. If your neighbor has planted English ivy, Oriental bittersweet, Japanese honeysuckle, wisteria, or kudzu it will likely make its way to your property sooner or later, if it hasn't already. In many cases it will show up from much greater distances than an adjacent property.

Let's return to our subject species *eupatorium serotinum*, commonly called "late boneset or late thoroughwort." There are at least eight species in New Jersey.

These plants have white-flowering blooms that make a rounded dome or flat-topped impression from their small flower clusters. The flowers have only the disk florets and no ray pedals like other species in the aster family. Their common name is thoroughwort or boneset. They flower August through October, offering nectaring opportunities into autumn. Their white blooms also add a lacy fringe to the garden. Seedheads have a furry white appearance.

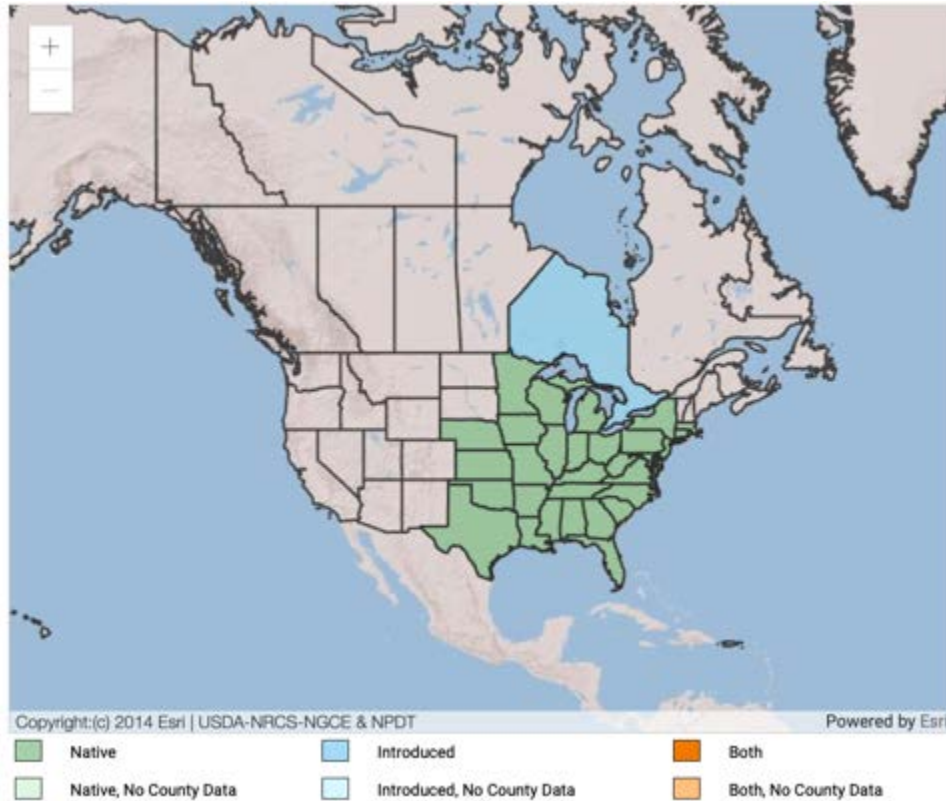
Late boneset has short hairs on its stems and leaves. The leaves are sharply pointed or lance-like with a coarse toothed edge, and are arranged opposite and alternately to one another. Three veins extend the length of the leaf from its stem. There are 9-15 tiny florets in a cluster.



*The tiny florets of boneset collectively make flat to slightly domed-top tufts, a structure that offers a lacy white splash of color to the autumn garden. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.*

This native perennial herb is present in the eastern half of the United States with the exception of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. It grows in a vast number of habitats

including disturbed ground like railroad embankments, wet ditches, overgrazed pastures, and capped dump sites. Natural habitats include open moist woods, swamps, black soil prairies, and bottomlands. It prefers full to partial sun.



Reports on its medical uses vary. A number of boneset species' leaves were historically placed under splints to help heal broken bones, thus its common name "boneset." The Houma tribe used a decoction of *e. serotinum* flowers to reduce fever caused by typhoid. Its cousin *eupatorium perfoliatum*, or common boneset, has a huge list of tribal uses attributed to it. Possibly *serotinum* was

gathered for many of the same medicinal purposes.



*The white florets add additional color tones to the garden.*

Webmd.com talks about its effectiveness for common cold (similar to aspirin), aching muscles, constipation, and producing vomiting. The Mayo Clinic indicates that homeopathic medicinal uses include treatment of inflammation and stimulation of the immune system. Webmd also offers many precautions and warnings; diarrhea, vomiting, and allergic reactions are possible.

Some related plants contain pyrrolizidine alkaloids that can damage the liver or harm a developing child. The take-home is that plants contain powerful agents that only skilled professionals should administer.



*Late Boneset is a great nectar source in autumn for pollinators. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.*

The nectar supports a wide range of pollinators including long and short-tongued bees, wasps, flies, butterflies, skippers, and moths. Several moth larvae eat the foliage of this plant, including the Clymene moth and

the lined ruby tiger moth. The eupatorium borer moth eats the roots of this and other species of related plants, and the three-lined flower moth eats the flowers and seeds (Bplant.org). I've seen it frequented by monarchs, buckeyes, hairstreaks, and cabbage white butterflies.

Its seeds are eaten by small birds. The plant is a popular selection for restoration sites and rain gardens. One advantage to hosting this pollinator is that mammalian herbivores tend to avoid the plant due to its toxicity. It tends to increase in abundance when deer are present, because deer will select other plants to browse on and leave it alone. Also, since late boneset is tall (four - five feet) it can shade tree saplings and dissuade deer from browsing on them as well.

Depending on your preferred aesthetics this plant may or may not hold curb appeal, but I'm a fan of the many creatures that it draws to our garden!

#### Sources

Late Boneset (eupatorium serotinum), Bplant.org

National Wildlife Foundation, Late boneset: A fragrant late-summer pollinator favorite, J. C. Sain, September 2016.

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Late Boneset, [IllinoisWildflowers.info](http://IllinoisWildflowers.info).