

## VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

### WILDFLOWER #72 answer: MISTFLOWER (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)

This sun-loving member of the aster family is well named: *coelestinum* means “sky blue” or “heavenly” and *Conoclinium* means “little beds of cones.” Asters can have disc flowers, ray flowers, or both; mistflower consists entirely of disc flowers.

Each tiny flower is a beauty—a pink, lavender, or blue tubular corolla with five spreading lobes. A two-parted thready stamen sticks gaily up, imparting a fuzzy or misty look. Forty to fifty florets bed together in a flowerhead, and flowerheads cluster in turn into a flat-topped corymb (like an umbrella whose spokes attach in different places). Thus, each “flower” is hundreds of flowers.

Mistflower grows in almost every county in Virginia, mostly in meadows. It resembles the lower-growing annual *Ageratum*, but it is a perennial, spreading vigorously by rhizomes as well as by seed. In fact, it is considered an invasive weed in China – we *do* export as well as import invasive species. If you plant it in your garden, you might witness an enthusiastic takeover.

Providing abundant nectar and pollen, mistflower attracts a wide variety of pollinators, most of them long-tongued, including bees, butterflies, and moths. The deep-veined, opposite leaves, chewed by caterpillars, contain alkaloids, an ingredient of some male butterflies’ pheromones. The same bitter chemicals prevent browsing by most mammals.

### WILDFLOWER #73

**Clues:** Half the story of this twining plant is hidden underground.



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