

# ASTER FAMILY ALBUM

## COMPOSITAE OR ASTERACEAE

### A Ray of Sunshine

Familiar to all gardeners is the aster or composite family, containing such favorites as marigolds, zinnias, sunflowers, and asters, along with ever-present weeds like the dandelion. It vies with the orchids for the reputation of being the largest family of flowering plants. The composites comprise in excess of 20,000 species and are distributed worldwide.



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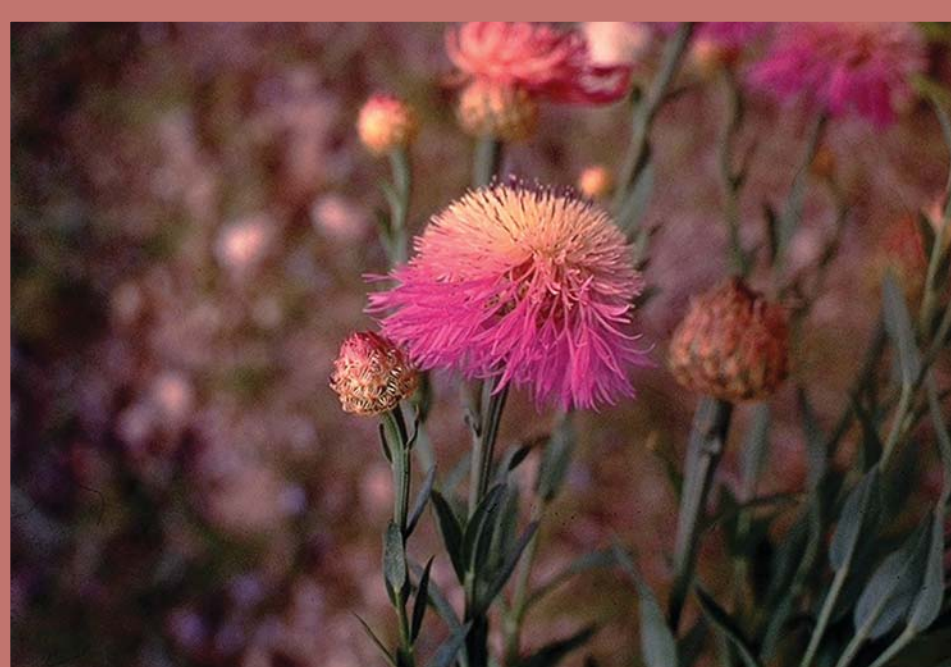
The “flower” of the composite is not really a flower at all, but an inflorescence comprised of many individual florets (greatly reduced flowers) packed closely together. The outer florets are usually called “ray” flowers; those in the center are the “disk” flowers. Across the family, there is much variation as to whether both ray and disk flowers are present.

Although we think of composites primarily as ornamentals, some are economically significant, such as lettuce, artichokes, and chicory. Stunningly beautiful fields of sunflowers, grown for seed and oil, inspired the powerful art of Vincent Van Gogh.

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