

Farewell *Galium asprellum*

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ABSTRACT. — *Galium asprellum* was reported in the 2013 Flora of Missouri, based on one specimen collected by Albert Chandler in 1953. That collection, along with at least three other Chandler specimens from the same collecting trip, are actually from northern Wisconsin. *Galium asprellum* Michx. should no longer be considered a member of the Missouri flora. Several other Chandler collections erroneously attributed to Missouri are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION

In their treatment of Missouri Rubiaceae in Volume 3 of the Flora of Missouri, Yatskievych and Taylor (2013) reported *Galium asprellum* Michx. from DeKalb County in northwestern Missouri, stating that within Missouri it was “known thus far only from a single, historical specimen.” The species had previously been suggested as a possible member of the Missouri flora by Gleason (1952), who described it as a species of “wet woods and thickets, Nf. to Minn. to N.C. and Mo., most abundant in the ne. part of the range.” The DeKalb County record appears to be a southwestern range extension for the species, with the nearest locality ca. 160 km northeast in southeastern Iowa (Kartesz 2015).

Since 2013, sources compiling biogeographic information have used the Yatskievych and Taylor (2013) report to include Missouri in the range for *G. asprellum*. Plants of the World Online reports Missouri in the native range for *G. asprellum* (POWO 2025). Flora of the Southeastern United States also attributes this species to Missouri (Weakley et al. 2025). In another instance, the publication of this report is reflected in updates to the BONAP system between 2013 and 2014 (Figure 1).

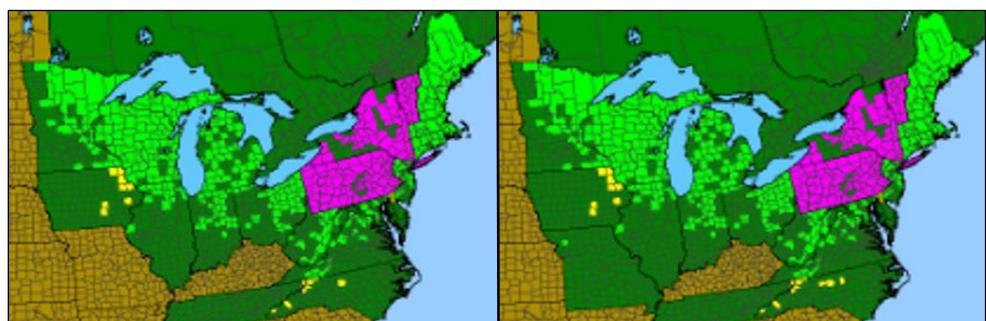


Figure 1. Two BONAP range maps of *Galium asprellum* Michx. distribution. The map on the left was generated 26 May 2013; the map on the right was generated 14 December 2014. Note the addition of a Missouri record in 2014.

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The historical specimen referenced by Yatskievych and Taylor (2013) is Albert Chandler s.n. (MO Accession: 2141985). Chandler collected the plant on 5 August 1953; it was initially labelled only as “*Galium*.” After subsequent determinations as both *Galium concinnum* Torr. & A. Gray by Charlotte Taylor in 1991, and *Galium triflorum* Michx. by Bill Summers in 1998, the sheet was determined as *G. asprellum* by Charlotte Taylor in 2002.

Chandler’s label information is sparse (**Figure 2**) and has no information about the habitat or description of the plant, and only a one-word describer for the location: “Bayfield,” all under a header of “Missouri.” Bayfield, Missouri was a railroad community in southwestern DeKalb County. Its post office was open from 1886 to 1917. Given the time gap between the extinction of Bayfield, MO and the time of collection, this does not seem to be the Bayfield being referenced on Chandler’s labels. It seems, instead, that the label header reading “Missouri” was an error. Note that the penciled in “DeKalb Co.” is an annotation added after the fact by an unknown person.

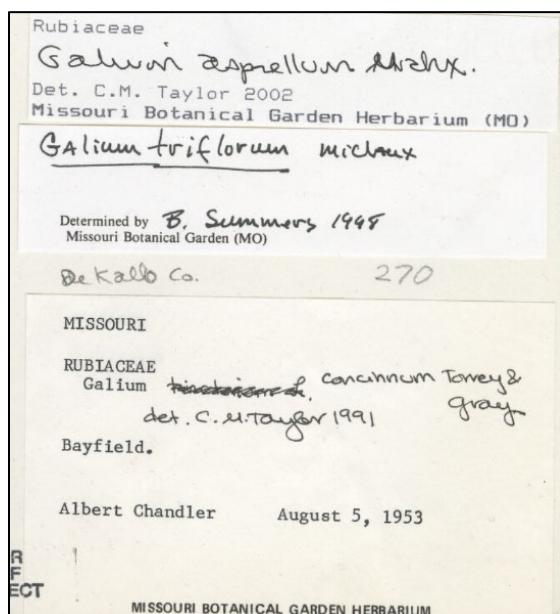


Figure 2. Label data for *Chandler* s.n. 5 August 1953 (MO 2141985).

As of 3 October 2025, there were 731 Albert Chandler specimens at MO with records available digitally on Tropicos (Teisher & Stimmel 2025). Of these, only four were collected in August of 1953, the last month represented in MO’s Albert Chandler collections. Each of these four collections, including the *Galium asprellum*, are from Wisconsin but mounted with labels reading “Missouri.” These collections, with their associated dates and locations are as follows:

Date	Determination	Locality	MO Accession
5 August 1953	<i>Galium asprellum</i> Michx.	Bayfield. Missouri.	2141985
6 August 1953	<i>Quercus rubra</i> L.	Madeline Island. Missouri.	2141988
7 August 1953	<i>Quercus rubra</i> L.	Madeline Island. Missouri.	2141987
8 August 1953	<i>Platanthera leucophaea</i> (Nutt.) Lindl.	.6 mile S of Sioux River bridge. 1½ mile S of Bayfield Park. Missouri.	2141989

The location information for the *Platanthera leucophaea* collection caught the eye of Bill Summers and George Yatskievych, who annotated the sheet in 1990 with the following: “Not from Missouri! This locality is near Bayfield, Wisconsin, ca. 50 min E of Duluth, Minnesota/Superior Wisconsin. Bayfield County?” The same locality comments apply to the other three sheets collected around that time, including the specimen forming the basis of the Flora of Missouri attribution of *Galium asprellum*. Madeline Island is a large island in Lake Superior just off the coast of northern Wisconsin near Bayfield. Evidently this is the same Bayfield referenced by Chandler in his collections from 5 August 1953 and 8 August 1953.

Because of this misreport of *G. asprellum*, there is reason to question Chandler’s other collections attributed to Missouri. However, of the ca. 160,000 sheets annotated on Tropicos with the “MO” keyword for the Flora of Missouri, only 271 were collected by Chandler from 1936-1951 (Teisher & Stimmel 2025). The four collections mentioned above were collected in 1953, two years after Chandler’s other Missouri collections. Moreover, if any of these collections represented similarly rare species, they likely would have been imaged for the physical Flora of Missouri reference collection at MO.

The Missouri Botanical Garden’s current project to digitize the entirety of the MO collection will likely lead to the discovery of more errors in this same vein. I would expect that the as yet unlocated MO sheet with accession number 2141986 is almost certainly a member of this group of Albert Chandler collections from Wisconsin with a Missouri label. It is probably sitting in a Missouri folder somewhere in the herbarium along with all the other errata that makes this work so interesting, and reinforces the critical importance of well-documented voucher specimens as the basis for understanding our flora.

After I completed this manuscript, I learned that Justin Thomas independently discovered the erroneous report of *Galium asprellum* in Missouri, which he shared with Missouri Department of Conservation staff, leading to its removal as a state species of conservation concern.

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