

Echinacea purpurea

Common Name(s): Purple Coneflower, Coneflower

Categories: Native Plants, Perennials, Wildflowers

Season: Summer into early fall

Height/Size: 1-3 feet tall and 20-28 inches wide

Flower Color: Rose, pink, purple, or white with gold centers

Hardiness: 3-8

Foliage: Simple or branched, often bristly, hairy stem; leaves are roughish above and sharply toothed; basal leaves are 3-8 inches long, egg-shaped, five-veined and stalked; upper leaves are lance-shaped, stalkless, and much smaller

Flower: 2.5 – 5 inch flower head; 12-20 drooping rays; cone-shaped center disk

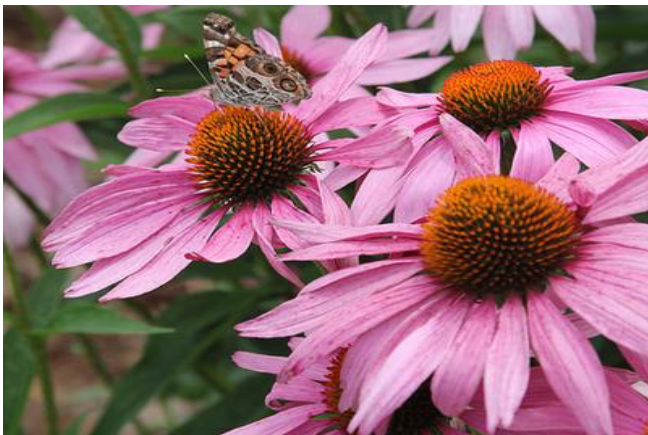
Site/Sun: Well-drained soil; drought tolerant; dry, open woods; Full sun to partial shade

Propagation: Division in spring or fall, self-seeding, root cuttings

Regions: Mountains, Piedmont, Coastal Plain

Origins: Native; Eastern USA

Comments: "*Echinacea*" is derived from the Greek word *echinos*, which means sea-urchin or hedgehog, referring to the pointy cone found in the center of flowers. Coneflower is one of the toughest perennials, tolerating dry, droughty soil, and hot summer sun. It is a nectar source for bees and butterflies while in bloom, and the seeds provide a winter food source for birds. This plant is resistant to damage by deer.



Currituck Master Gardeners Plant of the Month – October 2017

When, Where, and How to Plant

Fall is the best time for planting *Echinacea* sp. as well as other perennial plants. *Echinacea purpurea* will perform best in an area with full sun to part shade. They prefer evenly moist, well-drained soils. They are drought and heat tolerant once established, but have poor salt tolerance. It is best to propagate *Echinaceas* by division or by seed. *Echinacea purpurea* will typically self-seed annually in the landscape; however, if growing plants from scratch, seeds can be started outdoors in the spring or summer, up to two months before frost. Keep in mind that plants started from seed can take two or more years to develop into a sizeable plant.

Companion Planting and Design

Echinacea purpurea's upright, course texture lends itself nicely to mass plantings in naturalized areas or in the rear of perennial beds. They have strong sturdy stems that require no staking. This makes them popular as low maintenance perennials in the flower garden as well as specialty cut flowers in arrangements. Also, due to their high degree of drought resistance once established, they make a great addition to a water wise landscape. They are also deer resistant, used by butterflies use as a nectar source, and used by birds for their seeds. Rabbits, however, can over use the plant frequently eating the foliage down to ground level.

Care/Growing Tips

Coneflowers are not heavy feeders. In the absence of a soil test, they can be maintained with an application of 12-6-6 slow release fertilizer at a rate of 1 lb. per 100 sq. ft. in late March or early April, just before new leaves emerge. Once established in the landscape, dead foliage and stems can be removed each year in the fall, winter, or early spring. However, it is recommended that deadheading be delayed, as seed heads are very attractive to goldfinches in the winter. *Echinacea purpurea* can be divided every 3 to 4 years to prevent overcrowding in either the spring or fall months.

Coneflowers are subject to several disease and insect pest problems such as stem rot, powdery mildew, anthracnose, and aster yellows as well as damage from aphids, Japanese beetles, and mites. Cultural practices such as plant spacing, selecting well-drained soils, and proper sanitation by removing plant debris will help reduce disease problems.

Bloom Period and Season Color

Echinacea purpurea blooms in midsummer and continues to flower sporadically until frost. The flower petals extend from the center and tend to be slightly reflexed (drooping). Some cultivars of *Echinacea purpurea* include: 'Magnus', 'Ruby Star', 'Bravado', 'Bright Star', and 'Merlot'. Of these cultivars the blooms range in color from crimson to rose-pink to purple to white.