

## Catch the Coneflower Craze!

As new varieties of plants are promoted in gardening magazines, catalogs and at our local garden centers, many of us compile a list of some of the treasures that we'd like to try. The annual number of new plant introductions is staggering, and typically our biggest limitation in acquiring these plants is our budget. While some gardeners compete to be the first "on the block" to have a new, typically exotic, plant variety, don't forget to remember the importance and applicability of our native plants in our ornamental landscapes. Native trees, shrubs and perennials have become more available and are increasingly being targeted by plant breeders for development into interesting and/or improved varieties for our landscapes.

A trend that you may have noticed over the past couple of years is the breeding development of our native, perennial coneflowers (*Echinacea*) for the gardening market. While the purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) has historically been popular in perennial gardens, new selections from this species, combined with the

hybridization or combination with other species and varieties have created a wide range of choice selections that will thrive in our Midwestern gardens.

Coneflowers are part of the aster family and have a wide distribution in the United States and Canada. There are nine species of *Echinacea* located across North America although the largest native populations can be found in the Great Plains states. The Latin word *Echinacea* comes from the Greek echinos, meaning "sea urchin" or "hedgehog," a reference to the prickly scales of the seed head in the center of the flower petals. The purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is the most popular of the garden species and, along with some of its related species, has formed the framework for aggressive breeding that has created many garden-worthy specimens.

Coneflowers typically range in height from 12" to 48". They bloom throughout the hot summer, enjoy full sun situations and are very drought-tolerant once established. Furthermore, coneflowers are tolerant of tough sites and are very low maintenance once established. The flower petals of these "daisy-shaped" blooms can curve upwards, downwards or be fairly horizontal. The "architecture" of these blooms has become a very important feature of the plant. Butterflies and other wildlife also utilize *Echinacea* and will seek it out in your garden. There is a long history of medicinal use for *Echinacea* that continues to this day with millions of people throughout the world utilizing this herb as a short-term stimulant for the immune system.

### HYBRIDS AND VARIETIES OF ECHINACEA PURPUREA

CULTIVAR	HEIGHT	NOTES
Abendsonne	30"	cerise-pink blooms, strong grower
Alba	36"	downward facing, creamy white petals
Amado	36"	pure white flower petals around gold dome center
Art's Pride	30"	Orange Meadowbrite, tangerine blooms, fragrant!
Bravado	36"	lavender-purple blooms, mid-height
Bright Star	40"	large, bright pink flowers
Crimson Star	48"	dark, purple-red flower petals
Cygnets White	20"	compact plant, creamy-white flower petals
Doppelganger	30"	pink blooms, second petal layer 2nd year
Double Decker	36"	two-tiered pink petal layers 2nd year, interesting
Dwarf Star	24"	rosy-pink blooms on mid-size plant
Fancy Frills	20"	shaggy pink petals, very fragrant!, compact
Finale White	24"	creamy white blooms, copper orange cone
Fragrant Angel	40"	clear white blooms, very fragrant!
Green Eyes	30"	magenta blooms, green centers, fragrant!
Hope	16"	compact dwarf, fragrant pink blooms!
Indiaca	36"	pink blooms, second layer of petals on top
Jade	24"	white petals surrounding green center
Kim's Knee High	15"	dwarf, drooping pink petals, fragrant
Kim's Mophead	15"	dwarf, drooping creamy-white petals
Little Giant	16"	dwarf, reddish-pink blooms, fragrant!
Lustre Hybrids	40"	pure white thru purple to deep red shades
Magnus	48"	tall, clear purple blooms, award-winner
Mango		
Meadowbrite	30"	mango-yellow blooms, fragrant!
Ovation	36"	drooping rose-pink petals
Overton	30"	drooping petals, rosy-pink color
Paranoia	10"	compact dwarf, rigid yellow blooms
Prairie Frost	36"	magenta blooms, variegated foliage!
Primadonna		
Deep Rose	36"	lavender-rose blooms, 6" wide flowers, showy!
Razzmatazz	30"	double, "pom-pom" pink blooms
Robert Bloom	36"	upright petals in purple-rose shades
Rubin Glow	24"	purple-red blooms, petals drooping from center
Ruby Giant	36"	huge pink blooms, upcurved petals
Ruby Star	36"	horizontal reddish-purple petals
Satellite Mixed	30"	mix of pink and white shades, all with gold cone
Sparkler	26"	frosted white foliage, fragrant pink blooms!
Spinning Top	30"	semi-double, rosy-red blooms thru summer
Starlight	36"	carmine-rose flowers, horizontal petals, sturdy
Sunrise	30"	buttery-yellow blooms, fragrant!
Sunset	24"	vibrant orange blooms, fragrant!
Taplow Crimson	36"	rich crimson-purple blooms, very dark center
The King	48"	large, rose-red blooms, sturdy grower
Vintage Wine	36"	reddish-purple blooms on strong grower
White Lustre	30"	white petals surrounding orange center
White Swan	24"	white blooms, dark center, fragrant!

The Echinacea breeding and trialing programs have been focusing on crossing various species and varieties to create new flower colors, shorter plants, interesting flower shapes, sweet fragrance and now, variegated foliage! Coneflowers, once simply purple, white and occasionally the rare yellow, now come in shades of rose, pink, cream, white, wine-red, yellow and orange. There are many shades in between, and lots more to come. This coneflower craze is showing no signs of slowing up and will continue to offer the home gardener many options for enjoying these Echinacea varieties. See the accompanying chart to see some of the wonderful varieties and hybrids that originate from our native *Echinacea purpurea*. While these traits may affect your selection of a particular variety, all of these plants have the same tough disposition and can be a great addition to your garden. Consider being part of the coneflower craze this year and realize that the excitement is just beginning!

—Mark Dwyer, Janesville Rotary Gardens