

NICE! Plant of the Season Reported by Rozanna Francis

Purple Coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*: Part-shade to sun perennial

Description: Purple Coneflower is an herbaceous perennial in the sunflower family. It grows about 1-2 feet wide and 2-4 feet tall in bloom. Its dark green, hairy-rough, alternate or opposite leaves are up to 6" long and 3" wide, and are smaller at the top of the stems. Purple Coneflower is drought, heat and poor soil tolerant. Purple Coneflower's common and genus names reflect its flower characteristics. *Echinacea* comes from the Greek *echinos*, meaning spiny or prickly, while *purpurea* refers to the petal color of wild Purple Coneflower. Coneflower describes the flower's center shape.

Flowers and Seeds: Purple Coneflower blooms in late May and intermittently through the end of summer in North Texas. Its daisy-like flowers are held high on top of its stems. The showy flowers span 2.5-5 inches across. Each flower has 10-20 pink to lavender ray florets surrounding a central yellowish- to reddish-brown cone of numerous disk florets. The cone may be flattened and is prickly. The ray petals lean downward with age. Numerous cultivars of Purple Coneflower are now available in nurseries, in different heights, petal colors ranging from white to deep orange to deep red and with different colored flower cones.

Planting sites: Purple Coneflower thrives in part shade to sun and a range of soil types.

Watering Instructions: During long dry spells, Purple Coneflower may appreciate supplemental water if planted in full sun. Like many other native Texas plants, it needs good drainage.

Comments: Purple Coneflower is great in border, meadow, prairie, cutting and native plant gardens, as well as woodland gardens in part-sun. The plants will grow in size each year and may be divided every 4-5 years by digging up the clump, lifting it out of the ground and breaking it apart by hand. This is important for propagating the cultivars, because they will not breed true from seed. Purple Coneflower may also be propagated by cuttings and will self-seed, if the spent flowers are not removed. Purple Coneflower attracts butterflies as well as native bees and its seed in the dried flowerheads feeds fall and winter birds. The cut flowers are long-lasting in bouquets. Various parts of Purple Coneflower are used as herbal medicine, but please don't count on NICE for medical advice! Consider using Purple Coneflower instead of exotic Gerbera Daisy (*Gerbera jamesonii*) or African Daisies (*Osteospermum*) species. Companion plants for Purple Coneflower include Mealy Blue Sage (*Salvia farinacea*), Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*).

Look for NICE Plant of the Season signs and information sheets on your next visit to a participating North Texas nursery. Thank you for using native plants in your landscapes.

Written by Becca Dickstein



Photo courtesy of Marilyn Blanton