

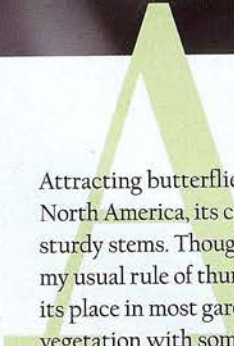


enchanting
ECHINACEA

With its long blooming and superb display of giant, daisy-like flowers, Echinacea is the perfect easy-care perennial for most sunny locations.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY MELANIE REKOLA

Echinacea Purpurea "Raspberry Truffle"



Attracting butterflies, bees and hummingbirds to gardens across North America, its colourful, fragrant flower heads are held high upon sturdy stems. Though its foliage is somewhat weed-like, going against my usual rule of thumb, the masses of eye-catching blooms vindicates its place in most garden circumstance. Just be sure to hide that weedy vegetation with some nice foliage companion plantings such as dwarf daylily, coreopsis or sedum.

Coneflower Facts

Commonly known as purple Coneflower, and possibly Canada's most popular native wildflower, Echinacea is simple to cultivate. Indigenous to the central plains of North America, it performs best in full sun but also adapts to partial shade situations. It is drought tolerant after it establishes. Most varieties are considered large by perennial standard, about 36-inches tall and 24-inches wide. But bear in mind, the plant's height when blooming varies widely by

cultivar and can range anywhere from 12 to 40 inches. Echinacea petals are edible and can be made into a savory spread, added to fruit salad, or sautéed with onion to add to various recipes. Coneflower is a strong and resilient plant resistant to deer destruction and damage from most garden variety pests such as aphids, caterpillars, grasshoppers, Japanese beetles and whiteflies. The only exception is the Leafhopper. Though Echinacea is impervious to most sickness, Leafhoppers transmit a disease called aster yellows, which often causes the flowers to form abnormally and remain green. Echinacea are also susceptible to powdery mildew.

Remedy For The Common Cold?

Frequently cited for its medicinal attributes, it was aboriginals who dubbed Echinacea "snakeroot," because its thick, black roots were used to treat snakebites. First Nations also used Echinacea as a cure-all for a wide range of other illnesses. *Continued on page 42*



Since then, the healing properties of Echinacea as treatment for cold and flu viruses have become recognized world wide. Although the cure to the common cold seems forever elusive, and although the herb's countless advocates claim that it possesses anti-viral and immune-boosting properties, there has been little scientific evidence to substantiate these claims.

So Many Varieties To Choose From!

The genus Echinacea was named after the Greek word "echinos," which means hedgehog or sea urchin and refers to the prickly, spiky central cone of the flower. The old garden standby, Echinacea purpurea had proved to be very easy to hybridize. Recent cultivars produce a rainbow of delicious flower colourations and types consisting of single, double or quilled varieties in hues of magenta, orange, pink, purple, white, green and yellow. Some varieties even boast petals that change colour over time. Continued breeding breakthroughs will surely follow to keep up with the demand for these ever-popular garden perennials. Below are a few of my favourites.

Melanie's Plant Picks

- **Echinacea purpurea "Magnus"**: Though common, this original heritage favourite still makes my cut. Its magenta petals are held horizontally, making the blooms appear even larger. And with its rusty-orange centre, who says pink and orange don't go together? It's also very robust and multiplies quickly. A close cousin that also

performs amazingly is Echinacea "Pow Wow," with vivid, deep rose-purple petals that retain their colour even longer than the original.

- **Echinacea Purpurea "Raspberry Truffle"**: This is a short and sturdy selection of Coneflower with salmon pink blossoms held upon thick chocolate stems. I often prefer the shorter varieties, including Echinacea "Kim's Knee-high" and "Echinacea Red Knee-high" as they take up less room and can be placed towards the front of the perennial boarder.
- **Echinacea Purpurea "Razzmatazz" Pink Double Delight**: I adore the uniquely shaped pom-pom flowers of this Coneflower. Its showy blooms have a rose-pink centre with magenta, daisy-like surrounding petals. It's another shorter, sturdy variety of Coneflower that is easy to place, even where space is limited.
- **Echinacea "Big Sky Sunrise"**: Large and architectural, this elegant butter-yellow Coneflower is a beauty to behold. Its five-inch blooms have an orange centre with petals that fade from yellow to cream with age.
- **Echinacea "Tomato Soup"**: Tomato Soup is a bright, tomato-red Coneflower whose five-inch-diameter flowers feature slightly drooping petals with rounded, dark yellowish-brown centres. Tomato Soup is also one of the larger varieties of the Coneflower family.



As with all perennials, be bold and plant in groups with repetition throughout your garden to get maximum impact from this marvelous statement plant. Keep your Echinacea looking its best by deadheading regularly to extend its blooming period, and bring a

bouquet inside as they also make an excellent cut flower. In fall, leave your Echinacea standing as the seed heads provide winter interest to the often barren landscape. Plus they provide a food source for local songbirds. And if you haven't yet already, why not experiment with the immune enhancing properties of this famous herb the next time you contract a cold. Science fantasy or science fact; you be the judge! **OH**