

PENNSYLVANIA GARDENER

PENNSYLVANIA'S OWN GUIDE TO GREAT GARDENING & LANDSCAPING STATE-BY-STATE GARDENING

**PLANTS
THAT CAN TAKE
THE HEAT**

Best Plants for Max Bloom

**ECHINACEAS
FOR EVERY
GARDEN**

July/A



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On The Cover

Zinnia 'Zahara Fire'

PHOTO: GEORGE WEIGEL



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An Echinacea for Every Garden

Echinaceas perform best in full sun, but these are blooming well in shade at the Fort Wayne, Indiana, Children's Zoo.

Be it formal or a more casual cottage style. There's probably a coneflower appropriate for your garden, echinaceas for everyone!

By Kylee Baumle

I'll never forget the first time I met the coneflower. It was the summer of 2004, and I was strolling with a friend through the Chicago Botanic Garden. The echinaceas were in full, glorious bloom, and butterflies were flitting from one flower to another, perching themselves atop the domed centers with pink hula skirts below.

"Touch it," my friend said. I was new to gardening then and didn't know what to expect, but I reached out and carefully placed my fingertips on the middle of the nearest bloom. Sometimes things are not as they seem and this flower didn't feel real. As most gardeners know, the center of an echinacea bloom feels like plastic!

Thus began my fascination with coneflowers. Since I discovered the purple coneflower species (*Echinacea purpurea*) that day in Chicago, with its classic pink petals, my garden has grown to include many more—all hybrids. But I had to wait a few years to get them.

From Wildflower To Wow-flower

Native to the Eastern United States, coneflowers can be grown in Zones 3 through 9, with newer cultivars being a little less cold hardy. Besides its use as an herb to help boost the body's immune system, its versatility in the garden as an ornamental makes it the choice of many gardeners.

Undemanding in its basic requirements, echinacea grows well in part shade to full sun and is drought tolerant once established. Like most plants, it prefers

well-drained rich soil, though it seems to do just fine in clay, too. (I can personally vouch for this.) Truly, this plant is one of the most no-care plants in my garden and it forgives my neglect. With simple dead-heading, it provides steady blooms from June through September.

In the late 1990s, Chicago Botanic Garden's Dr. Jim Ault began crossing the familiar pink *Echinacea purpurea* with another native, *Echinacea paradoxa*, which is yellow. Through continued hybridizing, Dr. Ault produced the first hybrid coneflower — 'Orange Meadowbrite' — which was introduced to the public in 2004. This was just the beginning of a new palette of colors for coneflowers.

(It was during this time that I had visited the Chicago Botanic Garden and learned of the breeding program. While touring the large prairie meadow there, I saw 'Orange Meadowbrite' growing.)



'Coconut Lime'



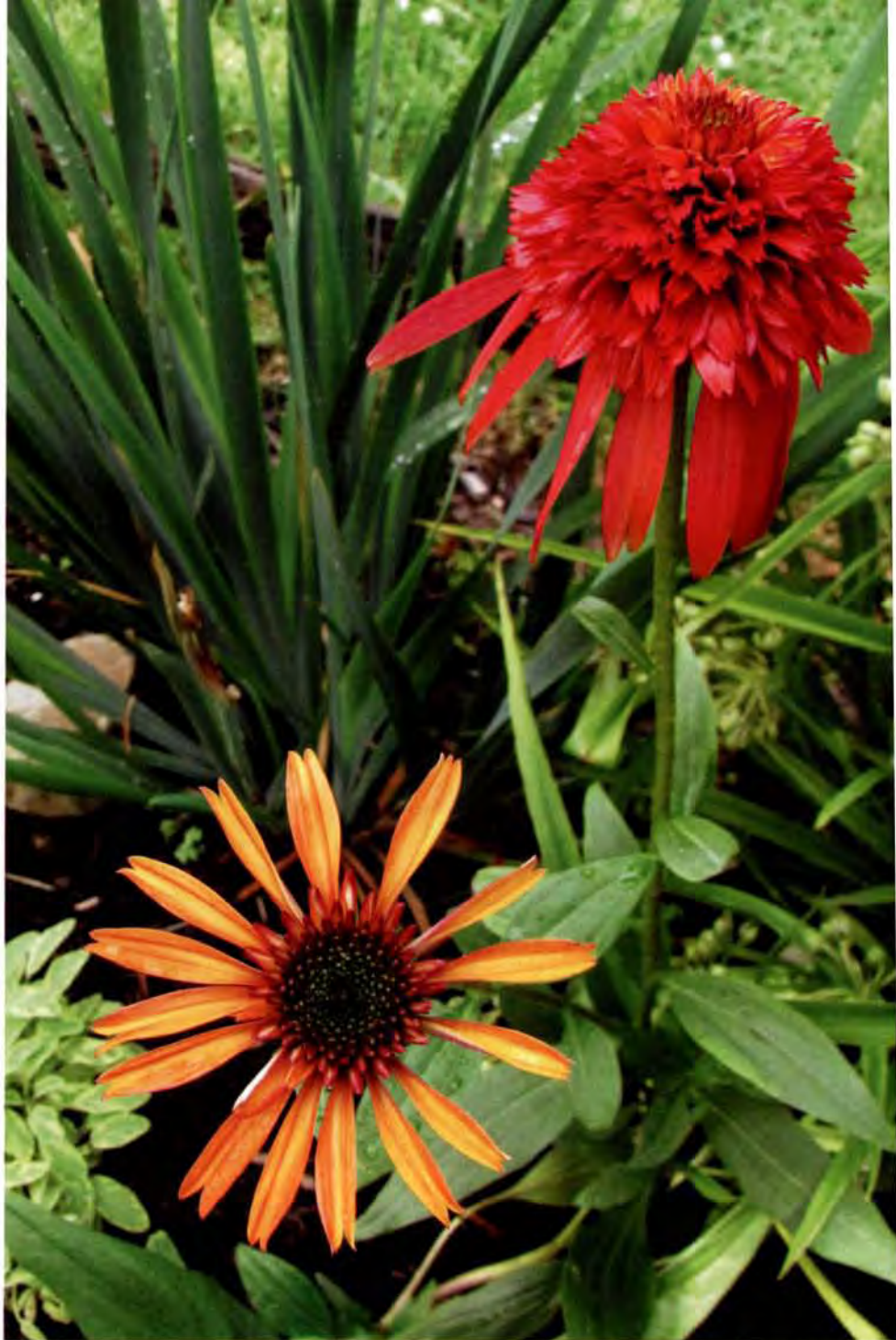
Green Envy™

Double Dutch Hybrids

Subsequent breeding created a buffet of blooms ranging in color from white to yellow to green to orange. One — Green Envy™ — is both pink and green. New forms began to appear, too. Some of my favorites of the newer varieties are those with atypical centers. Called double cone-flowers, they have a ring of shaggy shorter petals around a smaller prickly center in addition to the regular ring of daisy-like petals. Some of them seem to be all petals with no prickles.

One of these doubles, *Echinacea* 'Coconut Lime', has been a star performer in my own garden, with an abundance of greenish-ivory blooms that sometimes last for two months — each bloom lasts that long! Also a double bloomer with equally long-lasting flowers is 'Pink Double Delight', introduced in 2008 by Dutch breeder Arie Blom.

Blom is also responsible for the recent sensation 'Hot Papaya'. Unlike any other echinacea hybrid before it, watching 'Hot



Though these blooms look like they are two different plants, they are both on the same stem of 'Hot Papaya', clearly demonstrating the change each bloom goes through as it fully opens.

Aster Yellows

While coneflowers are relatively trouble-free plants, they are susceptible to a condition called "aster yellows." A viral disease, it is transmitted via the leafhopper insect. The leafhopper feeds on an infected plant, and then feeds on a healthy one, injecting the virus into the plant. Once a plant shows signs of the aster yellows, it will not recover and it is best to destroy the plant to help prevent spread of the infection to other susceptible plants.

A coneflower with the aster yellows will exhibit yellowing of the leaves, with occasional curling and twisting of the foliage. Foliage may be smaller and narrower in size. In addition, the flower itself will sometimes be deformed, with bizarre tufts of foliage growing out of the center of the flower or in place of the flower altogether.

This Tennessee coneflower 'Rocky Top' looks very much like the species, found only in a small area of Tennessee.



Papaya' come into full bloom gives new meaning to the phrase "a work in progress." It starts out looking for all the world like a pale orange coneflower, with the traditional species form. As it matures, it begins to fill out and darken until it becomes a frilly frou-frou bloom of the most luscious deep shade of orange-red, reminiscent of a scarlet tanager's feathers.

Back To The Species

As exciting as the new cultivars are, even the species has some pretty interesting members of the family. Indigenous to the cedar glades of central Tennessee (and only found there) is the Tennessee coneflower (*Echinacea tennesseensis*). On the Federal endangered species list, it has the unique characteristic of having petals that are not drooping like its *E. purpurea* cousins. They're straight out and even a little flipped up on the ends, giving the flower a somewhat wind-blown look. The foliage is more grass-like, as opposed to the wider oval-shaped leaves of *E. purpurea*.

Though the Tennessee coneflower is rare and endangered (meaning you can't just go to Tennessee and dig your own), a hybrid that very closely resembles the species has been developed. Called 'Rocky Top', it is fairly easy to find if you want it in your own garden.

Whether you choose the native *Echinacea purpurea* or some of the newer hybrids, there's probably a coneflower appropriate for your garden, be it formal or a more casual cottage style. Some grow as tall as 48 inches, making them suitable for the back of the garden, while others only grow to 12 inches in height. These work well as a border plant and in containers.



Yummy-Sounding Echinacea

New plants acquire their cultivar names in various ways, but it's obvious that some of them are food inspired. Two years ago, we discovered 'Tomato Soup' and 'Mac and Cheese'. Look for these new introductions:

- 'PowWow Wild Berry', a compact deep rose purple, won the 2010 All-America Selections (AAS) Award.
- 'Raspberry Truffle', a double from Arie Blom has the added advantage of being fragrant.
- 'Cranberry Cupcake' is an improved version of 'Razzmatazz', also a double.
- 'Summer Cocktail' sports blooms in shades of yellow, orange and pink all on the same plant.
- 'Marmalade' is another double in orange.
- 'Now Cheesier' is a new and improved 'Mac and Cheese'.
- 'Aloha' wears shades of melon yellow on its single-petaled flowers.
- 'Firebird' looks like a shuttlecock in a deep orange-red color with definite recurved petals.
- 'Quills and Thrills' features petals that are quilled, not often seen on echinaceas.
- 'Secret Pride' is a double with subtle ivory and taupe shades that go with everything.

But Wait! There's More!

These are exciting times to be in love with coneflowers. Affectionately known as "coneheads," those of us who welcome the new hybrids and can't wait to see more will have our wishes granted. Terra Nova Nurseries alone introduced several new varieties in 2010 and 2011. But not all of these will be found in one place. You may see some of the new introductions in your local garden center, but if you have your heart set on a certain cultivar, you may need to seek out an online source. 🐛

Kylee Baumle is a freelance garden writer and photographer living and gardening in Zone 5b. She is the author of the award-winning blog, Our Little Acre and always has room for just one more echinacea.