

# Echinacea purpurea (Eastern Purple Coneflower)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner  
by Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 12-18”  
Foliage Width: 18-24”  
Flower Height: 18-36”  
Foliage Color: Green  
Flower Color: Purple  
USDA Hardiness: 3-9  
Moisture: Average  
Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



Echinacea purpurea is native to nearly half of the United States. It ranges North to the Great Lakes, South to Florida, and West to Colorado. This plant is extremely cold hardy down to zone 3, but some cultivars may not be as hardy.

It naturally may be found in areas of open prairie to lightly wooded areas. Its adaption to lightly wooded areas allows it to tolerate some light shade when necessary. Echinacea can acclimate to a wide variety of soil types but does not like to be overly wet or extremely dry. It enjoys an average ph of 6.5-7. Most average garden conditions are perfect for this plant, which needs very little pampering.

Some of its more interesting common names are Kansas Snake Root, Scurvy Root, Indian Head, or Hedgehog. Echinacea grammatically finds its roots in the Greek word Echinus, which means “Hedgehog” and is a reference to its spiky seed heads.

Depending on which area of the country the plant is growing, it will bloom for 8 weeks or more between the months of April and October. The flowers are fairly long lived and make excellent cut flowers because of their long stiff stems.

Echinacea purpurea attracts both small- and large-winged butterflies, birds in the wintertime (especially goldfinches), and many pollinators. While butterflies and bees feed on the nectar, they spread pollen between plants, thus ensuring genetic dispersal and variation. Deer seldom bother this plant because of its rough-textured leaves and stems.

Echinacea purpurea has many medical uses. Over 200 medicines have been derived from Echinacea extract. Native Americans used this plant for everything from a pain reliever to helping treat coughs, sore throats, and colds. It was even used to treat infections and dress wounds. Studies in modern medicine have also shown Echinacea purpurea to strengthen immune systems and help fight against bacterial and viral infections. Some chemical compounds in the plant have even been proven to have inhibitory effects against certain types of cancer.

Pioneers often sought the roots of this plant because the roots had a salty taste when consumed; hence its nickname “thirst plant”. Eating the roots actually reduced a person’s desire for water when water was in short supply.

Echinacea has earned its reputation as a backbone of the perennial garden. The breeding and genetic selections of this plant have created a wide range of colors, including purple, white, red, and pink. Breeding has given us a choice of growth habits as well, ranging from the small compact to the full- sized natural beauty. Echinacea purpurea is an excellent addition to almost any perennial garden.