

Rudbeckia fulgida (Orange Coneflower)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 18-36”
Foliage Width: 18-36”
Flower Height: 24-36”
Foliage Color: Green
Flower Color: Yellow
USDA Hardiness: 3-8
Moisture: Average
Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



Rudbeckia fulgida is native to most of the Eastern United States. Cold hardiness is not an issue with this leafy family member, allowing it to be happy down to zone 3. The small rosette of leaves is evergreen but not showy enough to make much of a display during the winter.

This species of Rudbeckia is named for Olof Rudbeck the Elder, a Swedish botanist from the 17th century. If we translate fulgida from Latin, it means shining, gleaming, or glittering. These are wonderful adjectives to describe the glowing show of the flowers, which starts mid summer and lasts through fall.

Because the Rudbeckia family has many visually similar members, common names can get a bit confusing. Rudbeckia fulgida is often called Black-eyed Susan like its cousin Rudbeckia hirta, but Orange Coneflower is a better description because its yellow flower petals have a bit more orange in them than hirta's.

This member of the Rudbeckia family is very adaptable, allowing it to tolerate a wide range of soil types. The masses of glowing Rudbeckia seen around town and in yards are usually the cultivar “Goldsturm”. Goldsturm was named perennial of the year in 1999 and since then has proven itself to be a garden mainstay. It thrives in well-drained average garden situations that possess partial to full sun conditions.

Pests generally do not bother this plant. The rough texture of the leaves makes it less desirable to deer and rabbits, which is also another plus. Butterflies, on the other hand, love its glowing flowers, and the seed-packed flower heads in the fall are a buffet for birds. The strong flower stems are excellent for cutting and can also be dried for enjoyment all winter!

We know the flowers are pretty, but have you ever considered the foliage closely? There is some discussion to specifics, but gardeners' noses sometimes will encounter a pleasant sweet, citrusy smell when working with the foliage.

The Cherokee Indians harvested various parts of this plant to help with treatment of a wide variety of medical issues. Rudbeckia species in general have many medicinal uses. Rudbeckia fulgida was used in the treatment of earaches, kidney issues, and even snakebites.

Rudbeckia fulgida is a wonderfully hardy perennial. It is always lovely to see, whether the flowers are brightening a roadside or our backyards.