

Rudbeckia laciniata (Green-headed Coneflower)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 72-96”
Foliage Width: 72-96”
Flower Height: 48-96”
Foliage Color: Green
Flower Color: Yellow
USDA Hardiness: 3-9
Moisture: Average - Wet
Light: Part Sun - Shade



Rudbeckia laciniata is native to most of the United States except for California, Nevada, and Oregon. This wonderfully huge Black-eyed Susan relative is found in both dense and open woodlands.

There are a few regional names that are derived from some of the plant's more endearing characteristics. The leaves are very deeply and sharply lobed, leading to the name "Cutleaf Coneflower". Because it usually stops growing at 8 feet but has occasionally reached a towering height of 10 feet, I would say being called "Tall Coneflower" is very appropriate. "Green-headed Coneflower" describes the cone of the flower. The cone of the Black-eyed Susan is black, while this beauty's cone is green.

Green-headed coneflower is a very hardy perennial when planted in the right location. Moist, shady to morning sun locations are where it will thrive with little extra care. The clump will slowly grow in size, but like the common Black-eyed Susan it also volunteers well from seed. Between its immense size and its propensity for self seeding, make sure to allow plenty of space for this beauty to spread.

The floral display begins in the late summer and lasts well into the fall, sometimes until the first frost. The beauty of a 10-foot-tall Rudbeckia clump covered in blazing yellow flowers is hard to imagine until it is actually seen. However, the flowers are more than just a pretty face; they also can be used to make green dyes. Flower stems are sturdy enough for cutting, so bring a few inside to enjoy.

The local wildlife love this plant. Although deer and rabbits nibble on the young leaves in the Spring, this does not slow its growth. Butterflies visit during the summer for nectar, and when winter arrives a bird buffet is created by old seed heads. Winter-feeding birds, especially finches, love the seed of Rudbeckia. So if you enjoy local feathery friends, do not cut down the towering stems until they are picked clean by the birds.

Medicinally speaking, this Rudbeckia was sought out for many reasons. The Cherokee formed extracts from various parts of the plant to create teas, infusions, and ointments that were used to treat everything from indigestion to burns. The young shoots are edible, and the greens can be used in salads once prepared correctly.

Golden Glow and Golden Drop are two cultivars of this great plant; some have been around since 1894. Golden Glow has a full double flower and supposedly gets only 5 feet tall. Golden Drop is rumored to grow only to 2-3 feet. If your garden cannot handle an 8-foot beacon of glowing flowers, these are both alternatives, although they are more difficult to find.

The Green-headed Coneflower has been a part of our gardens for hundreds of years. Because of its combination of beauty, wildlife attraction, and medicinal and culinary uses, it was a favorite in your Great-Grandma's garden. Whether it's a smaller cultivar or the full-sized species, this is a great choice for most large shade gardens.