

Hardy Perennials Great for Area's Hot Conditions

By Steve Chaney, CEA-Horticulture

There are great perennials for North Texas, now is a great time to get some in the ground. A large number of colorful perennials do well with the hot sun, minimal water and poor soil of this area. Here are a couple of my favorites, just wanted to share a few tidbits of information about them with you.



Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) takes full sun to light shade. This plant is quite possibly one of the hardiest native perennials of them all. Found growing in prairies and along roadsides, it is nearly indestructible in home gardens – unless you try to pamper it with good soil, fertilizer and lots of water which simply cause it to grow too tall, flop over and die!

Each flower is a dramatic combination of a thumb or golf ball sized bristly orange cone (often described as the shape of an old beehive) and long, thin pink or white ray petals held above multiple-branching flowering stems. Some varieties have drooping petals, others stick straight out. These ‘noses’ persist well into the winter and are favorite sources of nutty seeds for goldfinches and other small winter resident birds. Native plant enthusiasts obsess over yellow forms and kinds with scraggly pink ray flowers; endangered forms, including the Tennessee coneflower (*Echinacea tennesseensis*) which is a low growing mound with an interesting greenish-pink cone and rays that stick straight out, are becoming more commercially available through specialty mail-order catalogs. Most gardeners tend to go for the big, bold varieties, including Magnus, Bravado and the rosy-purple Bright Star. White flowering forms include White Swan and White Lustre.



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Propagation is easy and fast from seed collected and sown in midsummer or early fall, which often will flower the next season. They are also very easy to dig and transplant as small seedlings in the winter. When blooms with central cones and 'ray' flowers (purple coneflowers, black-eyed Susan, sunflowers and zinnias) fade, seeds are already forming but will not be ripe for a few days. Wait until all the ray petals are completely brown and dry, then snip the cones from the stems and put them in a paper bag where they can continue to dry without scattering seeds everywhere. The seeds of the coneflower are light colored; the black bits are chaff.



Rudbeckia or Black Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* Goldsturm) take full sun or light shade. Felder Rushing, a friend of mine and a great garden writer, once described

this plant as unkillable. This was a perennial that he had found flowering profusely in a pot at a Texaco gas station in North Carolina in broiling hot sun and lots of reflected heat, covered in butterflies.

The typical Black Eyed Susan is 3 inches or so across, with a dark brown cone surrounded by many stiff yellow ray petals sticking straight out. Each flowering stem, up to about 2 feet high, is multi-branched with so many flowers in June and July and into August that a lizard could walk from one side of the mounded plant to the other without bending a petal. A few flowers will go into fall occasionally, giving you an interesting fall color. Brown cones are packed with small nutty seeds loaded with nutrition and plant fat for birds migrating into the area for winter.

Several different rudbeckias are available through specialty mail-order catalogs, includ-

ing cut-leaf coneflower with deeply lobed leaves (*Rudbeckia laciniata* Hortensia or Golden Glow is a popular old



pass-along plant with double flowers. Goldquelle is more compact and spreads less aggressively). There are many others as well, some more or less hardy than others. Propagation is very simple from seed, much the same as the purple coneflower and others like it discussed above.



Remember, heat loving perennials are perfect potted plants for patios, porches, and along walks and pools where full sun and all-night residual heat can wilt even the hardiest plant. Purple coneflower, rudbeckia, liatris and many other perennials found at your local nursery or dug up and given to you from a friend's garden will serve you well for many years to come with a minimum of water and care! (