

Echinacea purpurea - Purple Coneflower (*Asteraceae*)

Echinacea purpurea is a perennial for sunny to partially shady sites, with a distinctive array of summer-blooming pink-lavender or white-cream flowers. The sometimes pendulous petals sit atop stiff, vertical peduncles that arise from a clump of coarse, basal foliage.

FEATURES

Form

- medium-sized herbaceous perennial
- upright clump growth habit
- maturing at up to 3.5' tall x 1.5' wide

Culture

- full sun to partial shade
- performs best in evenly moist, well-drained soils of average fertility in partial sun, but is tolerant of full sun, heat, and drought (as long as a moderate amount of petal bleaching and leaf scorching is expected)
- propagated by clump division, root cuttings (not rooted stem cuttings, but cuttings from the peripheral roots), or by seeds
- Daisy Family, with minor foliage disease (leaf spot) or pest (Japanese beetle) problems; however, leaf scorch is the most common problem and often occurs during drought periods
- abundantly available in container form
- cut back dead stubble from the previous season's growth during late autumn, late winter, or early spring

Foliage

- medium to dark green, either originating as a clump from the crown (basal leaves are up to 8" long) or alternating along the flowering stems (upper leaves are up to 4" long)
- narrow ovate, coarsely dentate, scabrous (rough to the touch), with a long tapering acute apex, and also long-petioled (except for leaves on the upper stems), with the petioles and stems having a purplish tinge
- leaves will wilt when under drought conditions, but will recover with the evening dew



Flowers

- ray flowers ("petals") are lavender-pink (species form) or white (some cultivars), on inflorescences about 3" wide, with the petals either drooping (species form) or held horizontally (most cultivars), while the central disk flowers are raised into a cone or dome shape, ranging from golden-purple to bronzy-green in color
- the stout peduncles (flowering stalks, or "stems") join the swollen receptacles (the bases of each flower), creating a subtle inverted pyramidal shape at the juncture that is often unnoticed beneath the reflexed petals, but becomes more obvious as the

- peduncles become fruiting stalks; in addition, the receptacle is covered with prickly coarse scales
- best floral performance occurs by putting this perennial in sites with morning sun followed by afternoon shade, so that the petal colors will not bleach out in the intense afternoon heat and sunlight of summer
- each of the stiff flowering stalks has several flowers blooming over a month long period in July and early Aug., with occasional rebloom during late summer and early autumn, especially if deadheaded

Fruits

- seeds, as a unit, form a prominent central cone that turns gray in autumn, with seeds slowly shattering from the peduncle as the winter progresses (if not deadheaded or subjected to autumn cleanup), therefore, the fruiting heads are not especially ornamental

USAGE

Function

- mass or group plantings, borders, entranceways, rear of the perennial bed, and naturalized prairie or woodland edge sites; also good for cut flowers

Texture

- medium-bold texture
- open density

Assets

- showy summer flowers
- heat and drought tolerant (although some leaf scorch and wilting will occur)
- will slowly self-sow when placed in a neglected area for true "naturalization"

Liabilities

- cosmetic leaf damage will result from leaf scorch, leaf spots, and/or Japanese beetle feeding
- older plants that have not been divided for about 3 yrs. will have some peduncle lodging as the flowering season progresses (these can conveniently be used for cut flowers)
- self-sowing can slowly become a problem in perennial beds

Habitat

- Zones 3 to 8
- Native to Eastern North America

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- perennials with a medium-bold texture, upright growth habit, showy flowers, and cut-flower potential (*Leucanthemum* Superbum Group, *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm', *Sedum* 'Herbstfreude' ('Autumn Joy'), etc.)

Variants

- 'Crimson Star' - the most deeply pigmented crimson-lavender petals of any cultivar, with reddish central disks; a new introduction
- 'Magnus' - rose-lavender petals are held horizontally from the flowers, which are borne in profusion; 1998 Perennial Plant Association Plant of the Year ('Bravado' is a good substitute, if 'Magnus' is sold-out)
- 'White Swan' - white-cream petals, with golden-green central disks; a very worthwhile choice since it is one of the few showy white blooming perennials for mid- to late summer bloom; leaves, petioles, and peduncles are also a lighter green color; unfortunately, this and other white-flowering cultivars (e.g. 'Alba') are not as vigorous, floriferous, tall, or cold hardy as the pink flowering forms