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Echinacea purpurea - (L.)Moench.

Echinacea

Author	(L.)Moench.	Botanical references	43, 200
Family	Compositae	Genus	Echinacea
Synonyms			
Known Hazards	None known		
Range	N. America - Virginia to Ohio and Michigan, south to Georgia and Louisiana.		
Habitat	Dry open woods, prairies and barrens[43].		
Edibility Rating	 1 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 5 (1-5)

Physical Characteristics



Perennial growing to 1.2m by 0.5m.

It is hardy to zone 3 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from July to August. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Insects.

The plant prefers light (sandy) and medium (loamy) soils and requires well-drained soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It cannot grow in the shade. It requires dry or moist soil and can tolerate drought.

Habitats

Cultivated Beds;

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Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Leaves](#).

Leaves[160]. No more details are given.

Medicinal Uses

[Adaptogen](#); [Alterative](#); [Antiseptic](#); [Aphrodisiac](#); [Depurative](#); [Digestive](#); [Sialagogue](#).

Echinacea is considered to be the most effective detoxicant in Western herbal medicine for the circulatory, lymphatic and respiratory systems[238, 254]. Its use has also been adopted by Ayurvedic medicine[238]. Plants in this genus were probably the most frequently used of N. American Indian herbal remedies. They had a very wide range of applications and many of these uses have been confirmed by modern science. This species is the most easily cultivated of the genus and so has been more generally adopted for its medicinal uses[238]. The plant has a general stimulatory effect on the immune system and is widely used in modern herbal treatments [222]. In Germany over 200 pharmaceutical preparations are made from Echinacea[222]. There has been some doubt over the ability of the body to absorb the medicinally active ingredients orally (intravenous injections being considered the only effective way to administer the plant), but recent research has demonstrated significant absorption from orally administered applications[222]. The roots and the whole plant are considered particularly beneficial in the treatment of sores, wounds, burns etc, possessing cortisone-like and antibacterial activity[222]. The plant was used by N. American Indians as a universal application to treat the bites and stings of all types of insects[213]. An infusion of the plant was also used to treat snakebites[213]. The root is adaptogen, alterative, antiseptic, aphrodisiac, depurative, diaphoretic, digestive, sialagogue[4, 21, 61, 160, 165, 213]. It is harvested in the autumn and dried for later use [238].

Other Uses

None known

Cultivation details

Prefers a deep rich loam with plenty of leafmold[1] and a sunny position[175]. Succeeds in dry soils and tolerates drought once it is established[160]. Prefers a good light soil[187]. A very ornamental plant, there are some named varieties[187]. Slugs love this plant[K].

Propagation

Seed - sow March/April in a greenhouse and only just cover the seed [175, K]. Diurnal temperature fluctuations aid germination[175]. The seed usually germinates in 10 - 21 days at 25°C[175]. Prick out the

seedlings into individual pots once they are large enough to handle and grow them on in the greenhouse for the first summer. Plant them out in the late spring or early summer of the following year and give them some protection from slugs at least until they are established [K]. Division in spring or autumn[111]. Larger clumps can be replanted direct into their permanent positions, though it is best to pot up smaller clumps and grow them on in a cold frame until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the spring. Root cuttings, October in a frame[200].

Cultivars

There are some named forms for this species, but these have been developed for their ornamental value and not for their other uses. Unless you particularly require the special characteristics of any of these cultivars, we would generally recommend that you grow the natural species for its useful properties. We have, therefore, not listed the cultivars in this database[K].

Links

References

[K] Ken Fern

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon.** *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement.* 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal.* Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9 Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book.* Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[43] **Fernald. M. L.** *Gray's Manual of Botany.* American Book Co. 1950

A bit dated but good and concise flora of the eastern part of N. America.

[61] **Usher. G.** *A Dictionary of Plants Used by Man.* Constable 1974 ISBN 0094579202

Forget the sexist title, this is one of the best books on the subject. Lists a very extensive range of useful plants from around the world with very brief details of the uses. Not for the casual reader.

[111] **Sanders. T. W.** *Popular Hardy Perennials*. Collingridge 1926
A fairly wide range of perennial plants that can be grown in Britain and how to grow them.

[160] **Natural Food Institute**, *Wonder Crops*. 1987. 0
Fascinating reading, this is an annual publication. Some reports do seem somewhat exaggerated though.

[165] **Mills. S. Y.** *The Dictionary of Modern Herbalism*. 0
An excellent small herbal.

[175] **Bird. R. (Editor)** *Focus on Plants. Volume 5. (formerly 'Growing from seed')* Thompson and Morgan. 1991
Very readable magazine with lots of information on propagation. A good article on *Corydalis* spp.

[187] **Phillips. R. & Rix. M.** *Perennials Volumes 1 and 2*. Pan Books 1991 ISBN 0-330-30936-9
Photographs of over 3,000 species and cultivars of ornamental plants together with brief cultivation notes, details of habitat etc.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening*. 1992. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5
Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[213] **Weiner. M. A.** *Earth Medicine, Earth Food*. Ballantine Books 1980 ISBN 0-449-90589-6
A nice book to read though it is difficult to look up individual plants since the book is divided into separate sections dealing with the different medicinal uses plus a section on edible plants. Common names are used instead of botanical.

[222] **Foster. S. & Duke. J. A.** *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. Eastern and Central N. America*. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1990 ISBN 0395467225
A concise book dealing with almost 500 species. A line drawing of each plant is included plus colour photographs of about 100 species. Very good as a field guide, it only gives brief details about the plants medicinal properties.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses*. Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31
A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148
An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

Readers Comments

Echinacea purpurea

AI D. Sun Dec 29 17:28:36 2002

I have found it to be *very* drought tolerant. I think this is due to the plant's deep roots.

Link: [Michigan State University Horticultural Department web site](#) Describes the plant's preferences and also describes 8 different cultivars of this species

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