



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article      June 26, 2017

### Plant of the Month: Coneflowers by Lydia Holley

Coneflowers have been named the Plant of the Month at the Henderson County Master Garden Association's (HCMGA) Dream Garden located inside the East Texas Arboretum. These tough plants bloom reliably, have a long bloom time, attract bees and butterflies, are drought resistant, and are beautiful. What's not to love?

There are approximately 10 species of coneflowers native to the U.S. The most common native coneflower in East Texas is the purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*. Purple coneflowers reseed abundantly, so if you have one, you should easily be able to have more in future years.

To increase your stand of coneflowers, learn to recognize what the immature leaves look like in spring. Then, weed with an awareness and thoughtfulness in order to avoid weeding them out. For years, I mindlessly weeded out all my echinacea and coreopsis. I finally figured out that the emerging leaves looked like a weed to me, but with a little care and caution in weeding, I could leave the plants that I wanted. Now I have an abundance of both coreopsis and coneflowers.

Native coneflowers, depending upon the species, bloom purple, yellow, and occasionally, white. Hybrids can come in a rainbow of colors, including hot pink and bright orange. Hybrids can also come in doubles, which resemble a pom-pom, with petals on the bottom as usual, and a set of shorter petals where the cone would normally be.

There are so many different hybrids, it would be fun to be a serious coneflower collector. With so many colorful coneflowers to collect, you would be guaranteed to have an interesting garden. In addition to the colorful blooms, you would also mostly likely attract butterflies such as Painted Ladies, Swallowtails, Fritillaries, and Monarchs. Native bees and honey bees also appreciate coneflowers. Although the double hybrids may be more eye-catching to humans, they do not attract as many butterflies.

If you are interested in collecting coneflowers, you need to be aware that certain species of coneflowers are native to different areas of the U.S. due to the natural pH of the soil, climate, and other factors. So, certain hybrids will probably do better for you than others depending upon their parentage. You will be happy to know that many coneflowers are hybrids of *Echinacea purpurea*, so they should do well in East Texas.



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