

GO NATIVE WITH CONEFLOWERS

By Jane and Ray McGowen

“A large impressive center
From which the petals grow
I truly enjoy my Coneflower
Her beauty amazes me so”

- Marilyn Lott

One of our favorite plants to grow is the coneflower. Not only do the bees love it (which is so important to plant life), but, hummingbirds and butterflies are equally attracted to its flower. Cardinals, finches and blue jays relish on coneflower seed heads in the fall and winter, therefore, why not consider this easy-to-grow beauty in your garden landscape?

Formally known as Echinacea, coneflowers are native to North America and are members of the daisy family with raised cone-like centers that resemble a powder-puff. Purple is the most common variety, but coneflowers may also be white, pink, red, yellow, orange, or lime green. Depending on the variety, plants reach a height of 2 to 5 feet tall, and will grow just about anywhere if they have enough sunlight. They look best in a garden landscape among other perennial plants, but they are also quite at home in a sprawling wildflower meadow.

Coneflowers will tolerate poor soil if they have to; however, rich and well-drained soil is always favored to achieve strong, healthy plants. They will endure some shade, but full sun is preferred to maximize the best blooms that last most the summer. When initially planted, coneflowers need regular watering to keep them healthy but they will become drought tolerant when well established. These trouble-free plants are hearty and will gladly battle against potential gardening threats brought on by nature ... our coneflowers all survived the below-zero temperatures this past February and are thriving.

When coneflowers are spent, deadheading is typical to encourage more blooms throughout the summer. However, when fall arrives the dried powder-puff centers should remain intact to encourage reseeding for growth the following year. The spent flowers also give birds an opportunity to feast on the seeds in preparation for fall and winter temperatures: flora is very important but fauna should never be forgotten!

Happy Gardening!

