

ST/UX

Echinacea found effective in fighting off flu virus

I have been asked to referee a debate between Brenda Near and her mother regarding the correct botanical name for Purple Coneflower, a common perennial with pink daisy-like blooms from mid summer to fall.

First, let me congratulate you on your endeavor to master the language of plants - although it may seem difficult at first it is truly international while common names vary widely from one region to another. Secondly, you are both correct. This plant is known as either Rudbeckia purpurea or Echinacea purpurea. Since the recent interest in natural medicines, the name echinacea is becoming the most often used.

The genus name, echinacea, is from the Greek word for hedgehog and refers to the prickly spines on the seed head. Besides coneflower, other common names are droops (because the petals hang downward), red sunflower and red sun-bonnet. It has also been called Indian root and scurvy root referring to its medicinal uses in curing such diverse ailments as colds, snakebites and scurvy. Modern testing has found that chemicals in Echinaceas are effective in fighting viral infections including influenza. There is some indication that the plants may be useful in treating certain types of cancers or allergies.

In the garden, E. purpurea is a beautiful 3-foot-tall perennial with pink daisy-like blooms in late summer and fall. It prefers full sun and well-drained soil showing amazing drought tolerance when necessary and self-seeding prolifically if conditions are suitable. Several newer cultivars of E. purpurea are Bravado, Magnus, and White Swan, the creamy white form. Propagation is easy - seed grown plants may bloom the first year and established plantings can be divided in early spring.

Echinacea pallida is another pink coneflower with narrow, drooping petals. E. angustifolia is a shorter variety of E. pallida.

Another example of botanical name confusion occurred in the



Let's Get Growing

Marjorie Mason Hogue

1600s when some new plants arrived in Europe from South Africa. Because the flowers resembled the hardy geraniums (cranesbills) growing in the meadows they were so named. More than a hundred years later, differences were noted in the flowers and these tender plants were reclassified as Pelargoniums (Storks Bill).

The winter months are made for plant study. I will be teaching a four part series entitled The Making Of A Garden on Saturday afternoons in February at the Sacred Heart Church in Uxbridge. For more info call 905-649-3532.

I look forward to meeting many of you on Thursday, Jan. 23 at the Uxbridge Library. I'll be presenting a

free slide show at 7:30 p.m. entitled Learning From Gardens Around The World. Come with me on an armchair tour - the perfect way to spend a wintry evening.

Send your questions or comments to:

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