

The beauty of Echinacea is equal its value medicinally. The intense purple rosy and daisy-like flowers outshine most flowers in the herb garden. Even the Monarch butterflies find it attractive. This perennial plant's natural habitats are the prairies and dry plains of North America, mainly in the U.S.A., from southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, down into Texas.

The most common species of purple coneflowers are *E.angustifolia*, *E.purpurea* and *E.pallida*. *E.angustifolia* is in most demand medicinally though the other two mentioned species are just as effective when properly prepared. Below is a brief botanical description of the three common species:

E.angustifolia - is smaller and delicate, grows to 2 ft. Leaves are lanceolate with smooth margins. Flower petals do not droop but spread outward from the seed-head.

E.purpurea - grows to 5 ft. A robust plant with many ovate leaves. Leaf margins are toothed. Flowers are large with petals drooping towards the stem.

E.pallida - grows to 3 ft. Leaves are lanceolate with smooth margins. The colour of the flowers vary from purple to white and are drooping.

The part of the plant used in herbal preparations is traditionally the root. When eating the fresh root an unusual tingling, numbing sensation occurs in the mouth and increases saliva flow. This anesthetic-like effect is also present in the seeds when sprouted. It is a good indicator as to how fresh the Echinacea preparation is.

With today' attention on immune deficiency diseases, this is one herb we cannot overlook. Research in Europe indicates that

Echinacea does stimulate the immune system. This occurs when the polysaccharides present in the plant, (complex carbohydrates which convert into sugars), stimulate the T cell lymphocytes, which in turn increases the production of interferon. This interferon activity protects cells against viral and bacterial infections. One polysaccharide named echinacin B has been isolated from *E.angustifolia* & *E.purpurea* and its' effect is healing for inflammations, wounds and swellings.

Echinacea also contains an essential oil which has been tested in the treatment of tumors. One case history involves a strong reaction to mosquito and black-fly bites. Symptoms are abnormal skin swellings and swollen lymph nodes. Echinacea taken internally reduced the swellings.

Another case history involves the Epstein-barr virus, (a herpes-like virus). Ingestion of Echinacea over a period of time, along with dietary changes, improved the vitality of the immune system. Energy level increased along with an improved resistance to minor colds and flu.

The Native Indians used Echinacea for snake bites. They were aware of Echinacea's blood cleansing properties and also used the plant for cancers and infections.

Echinacea is most effective when used in its' fresh state. If you are buying dried roots chew a piece first, if there is no numbing sensation in the mouth then the roots are old or improperly dried. *E.angustifolia* dries well, though reports indicate that this species is sometimes substituted with *E.purpurea* or *E.pallida* and sold as *E.angustifolia*. The roots are best harvested in fall. Being a native plant this is one instance where we do not have to rely on importation and we should encourage the local herb farming of this species, (although it does take at least 3 years for the roots to mature and make it

worthwhile digging up the plant!).

Dosage of Echinacea tincture is up to 30 drops, 3 times a day for adults depending on the seriousness of the ailment. The tincture is usually taken for the duration of the illness, but of course there is a saying that you can take too much of a good thing, and this is true with Echinacea. For example if you drink coffee every day the pick me up effect will eventually over stimulate you or will cease to work. Do not ingest Echinacea continuously over a long period of time, give your body a periodic rest from the immune stimulation.

The only observed side effect from ingesting Echinacea is nausea, although this is rare. It usually indicates that the body is full of toxins, so decrease your intake of the herb.

Anyone who would like to obtain this or any other tincture can leave me a personal message here in the Garden. Alternatively it can be purchased from the Occult Store on Vaughn Rd.

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