

What's new Cwith Coneflowers?



Our expert weeds through a ton of recent introductions to help you select the best of the bunch

- 1. 'Sunbird'
- 2. Sombrero® Salsa Red
- 3. Double Scoop™ Bubble Gum
- 4. 'Orange Passion'
- 5. Sombrero® Sangrita
- 6. Kismet® Yellow
- 7. 'Snow Cone'
- 8. 'Pica Bella'
- 9. Sombrero® Hot Coral
- 10. 'Santa Fe'



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Top-performing coneflowers



Pixie Meadowbrite[®]

notos, except where noted: Danielle Sherry. Other photos: courtesy of Richard Hawke (pp. 42-43, 44, 47, 48, 52); Bill Johnson (pp. 45, 48); Mic ova Photo Graphik/gapphotos.com (p. 50, bottom right); courtesy of Missouri Botanical Garden (p. 50, bottom left)

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The following coneflowers are not necessarily brandnew, nor did they arrive at nurseries within the past year. They are newer, or at least lesser-known, coneflowers that deserve a second—or even first—look.

Pixie Meadowbrite® (Echinacea 'CBG Cone2') came along a few years into the coneflower craze, and honestly, it didn't get enough attention because it wasn't orange, red, or yellow. The pixie-sized bright pink flowers are charming and bountiful, crowning compact plants for most of the summer. What Pixie Meadowbrite® lacks in stature—it's just under 2 feet tall—it makes up for in staying power. Along with its slightly upturned ray florets and hairy leaves and stems, it gets longevity from the long-lived Tennessee coneflower. Chicago Botanic Garden's Jim Ault bred and selected Pixie Meadowbrite® from a complex cross between E. purpurea, E. tennesseensis, and E. laevigata. This three-way hybrid combines all the best aspects of each parent.

It's probably safe to say that double coneflowers are not for everyone. The floral architecture is too fussy or unnatural for some, while those keen on pollinators don't much care for them. I get it—my love is conditional too. 'Milkshake' received top marks for its habit as much as its double flowers, which open greenish and turn creamy white to white. The flowers have a crisp form—cones are transformed into chrysanthemum-like pom-poms skirted by a row of droopy rays. White flowers tend to show all their blemishes quickly and more obviously than other colors, but 'Milkshake' looked fresh for a long time. It also has the sturdiest stems of any coneflower I've grown. The proof of its stoutness was observed when a storm with 60 mph winds raged through the trials. I watched from my window as strong winds pushed everything sideways except for 'Milkshake', which bobbed back and forth but didn't bend.

Not every top-rated plant makes my list of favorites. However, **'Firebird'** made the cut its first summer, and in later years it has never failed to impress me or give me pause to reconsider. Masses of smoldering red-orange shuttlecocks hover gracefully over the plant like a flock of birds taking flight. Many hybrid coneflowers show their roots as the flowers fade to shades of purple—often with not-so-pretty results—but 'Firebird' passes from its fiery color to a pleasing reddish purple. 'Firebird' is what I always wished Orange Meadowbrite® (E. 'Art's Pride') had



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Top-performing coneflowers





been—namely, a perfect combination of beautifully vivid flowers with a vigorous strong-stemmed plant.

I expected red flowers on **Sombrero® Salsa Red** (*E*. 'Balsomsed'), but the vibrancy of the scarlet-red rays was like a sultry dream come true. Starkly white undersides, which are most noticeable as the rays unfurl, were also a surprise. The 3-inch flowers with slightly droopy rays are perfectly sized for the well-branched, compact plants. Flower color as it fades is something we watch carefully on all coneflowers; some of the earliest orange and red cultivars often faded to a ghastly washed-out pink. Sombrero® Salsa Red dulled to a less vivid red yet remained colorful and attractive longer than many other coneflowers. Burgundy-red stems enhanced the show.

The difference between most purple coneflowers and 'Glowing Dream' is like that moment when The Wizard of Oz goes from black and white to full color. The watermelon-pink rays are of a singular, nearly fluorescent color—large red to orange cones turn up the volume further. This is one flower to see in person; the true intensity of its iridescence is difficult to capture on camera. Even the faded flowers were beautiful, with the color dialed down just a notch or two. Stout and well-rounded, 'Glowing Dream' has a Munchkin-like habit with purple stems.

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Top-performing coneflowers



For about 15 years, I've been recommending 'Pica Bella' (photo p. 47) to gardeners who desire a reliable, traditional-looking purple coneflower. Whereas some purple cultivars are undependable, 'Pica Bella' is a consistently strong, long-lived coneflower with an abundance of quirky flowers from late spring to autumn. Deep pink ray florets and orange cones may sound commonplace, but the upcurled rays form a canoe shape, which gives the large flowers a pointy starlike look. 'Pica Bella' has a robust vertical habit too, with sturdy purple stems.

'Snow Cone' is a compact, almost diminutive coneflower. In the wave of all the astonishing flower colors, white coneflowers tend to be overlooked. 'Snow Cone' stands out for its distinctive chartreuse cones encircled by slightly drooping white rays. 'Snow Cone' earned my admiration in and out of flower, and it was always among the top-rated coneflowers and a visitor favorite. For a small plant, it never skimped on flowers or charm.

The upturned pink rays of **Tennessee coneflower** (*E. tennesseensis*) are unique among its kin. The flowers tilt slightly toward the east, which may seem like an obscure point until you're looking at their backsides! The hairy leaves and stems give the entire plant a lighter green appearance than that of other coneflowers. My original plants, planted in 1989, remained in place for almost 20 years—that's a lifespan nearly 10 times longer than that of purple coneflower (*E. purpurea*). Since it's grown from seed and is just as promiscuous as the rest, it's not uncommon to find hybrid plants masquerading as Tennessee coneflower at the nursery; look for the telltale upward rays and hairy leaves to be sure.

| TRIAL PARAMETERS |

The Chicago Botanic Garden is currently evaluating nearly 50 different coneflowers in comparative trials that started in 2019 (early results can be seen on p. 51). Since 1995, though, over 100 coneflowers have been evaluated in two separate trials (see the top performers profiled here and in the chart on pp. 52–53).

- HOW LONG: Minimum of four years
- **ZONE:** 5b
- CONDITIONS: Full sun; well-drained, alkaline, clay-loam soil
- CARE: We provided minimal care, allowing the plants to thrive or fail under natural conditions. We observed ornamental traits, monitored growth and environmental adaptation, recorded any disease or pest problems, and assessed plant injuries or losses over winter.

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| CULTURE BASICS |

Coneflower quirks

We've learned a few things about coneflowers since our first trial in the mid-1990s, and they may help explain why you have—or haven't—been successful in growing these plants in the past.

▶ Conditions can vary greatly

Not every coneflower has the same cultural needs, so hybrids between species might be more finicky about where they will grow, which influences longevity too. Purple coneflower, for example, likes consistently moist soil, whereas yellow coneflower (E. paradoxa, photo) prefers it drier.



Variable traits

Many popular cultivars, such as 'Magnus' (E. purpurea 'Magnus') and Ruby Star (E. purpurea 'Rubinstern'), are seed-grown—not clones—so traits will vary among individual plants.

▶ Longevity can be an issue

Purple coneflower (*E. purpurea*) is short-lived—two or three years is typical—and it reseeds readily. Since it's a parent of most hybrids, discovering that prized other-colored coneflowers are suddenly purple is possible, even inevitable. Reverting to the species is not the culprit; rather, seedlings have replaced the original plants as they died out.

▶ Cross-pollination is common

Coneflowers are promiscuous. Two or more types nearby in the landscape may produce seedlings in a variety of flower colors and plant habits.

Fragrance can be a plus

Surprisingly (to me anyway), new hybrids of many coneflowers are often sweetly scented, such as 'Tiki Torch' (E. 'Tiki Torch', photo).



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[PLANT HEALTH]

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY CONEFLOWER?

Several diseases and pests affect coneflowers. While your coneflowers may never get any of them, it can be troubling if they do.



Eriophyid mites

Floral damage caused by eriophyid mites mimics some of the symptoms of aster yellows (see below). In this case, the damage is only cosmetic and won't affect the health of the plant, although it will reduce seed production. Mites feeding on the flowers cause tufted growth or rosettes to form on the cones. The deformed flowers are unsightly and similar in appearance to aster yellows. Removing the affected flowers will improve the ornamental display and reduce the mite population.

Japanese beetles

The beetles feed on foliage and flowers, leaving ragged holes behind. Fortunately, their damage is mainly cosmetic. Hand picking adult beetles and disposing of them works best.



Powdery mildew

This disease typically occurs in overly moist conditions or from a lack of airflow. Plants that are already weakened by pests

or disease may be especially susceptible. Avoid powdery mildew by spacing plants properly and planting in well-drained soil.



Crown/stem rot

Normally resulting from overwatering (or from a plant being sited in an overly moist site), crown/stem rot results in the entire plant turning brown and essentially rotting away. Again, well-drained soil is key.



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Aster yellows

This is perhaps the most grievous problem because there is no prevention or cure—all parts of the plant are infectious and potentially harmful to other plants. A specialized bacteria called a phytoplasma spreads from plant to plant by leafhoppers, which are sucking insects that feed on coneflowers. Disfigured and chlorotic leaves, stunted stems, and distorted flowers are symptoms of aster yellows. Affected flowers may also show green spoon-shaped rays and/or a rosette of leafy growth on the cones (photo). The phytoplasmas multiply in the roots over winter, so symptoms worsen every year. Sanitation is best as soon as symptoms appear—all parts of the plant, including the roots, must be destroyed.

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New kids on the coneflower corner

While perhaps not brand-new, these coneflowers were new to our trials in 2019. They all show great promise with just one year under observation.

- **1.** If forced to describe the flower color of **LakotaTM Fire** succinctly, I'd probably say orangey pink. To be fair, this new seed strain features a mix of lush colors—bright orange, deep watermelon pink, red, and peachy pink. The various red hues are pretty individually and stunning as a whole from early summer to frost. The cheery $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch flowers feature nearly flat rays. LakotaTM Fire was 15 inches tall and wide last year and won't get much larger.
- **2.** Luminescent **'Golden Skipper'** from the Butterfly™ series has sunny lemon yellow rays and yellow-gold cones from early summer to frost. I'm a big fan of yellow coneflowers unless they're brassy yellow—isn't that what black-eyed Susans are for? It has 3-inch flowers and will ultimately be 18 inches tall and 24 inches wide.
- **3. 'Julia'** is another lovely coneflower from the ButterflyTM series that features deep orange-to-pink rays and cones reminiscent of monarch butterflies. A fuchsia nimbus radiates from the cone, softly coloring the base of the horizontal rays. The rich color eventually fades but is satisfying to the end. 'Julia' sports 3-inch flowers and will ultimately grow to be 18 inches tall and 24 inches wide.
- **4.** Last summer I was impressed with **Kismet® White** (*E.* 'TNECHKW'), which is the best white coneflower I've seen in some time. The bushy compact habit is crowned for over three months with an abundance of pure white flowers with green cones. The ray florets are held flat and fade with a yellowish tinge. Kismet® White was 16 inches tall and 13 inches wide its first summer and should only get a tad taller at 18 inches.
- **5.** The sultry vermilion flowers of **Sombrero® Sangrita** (*E.* 'Balsominita') make me swoon. The eye-catching flower show, with scores of 3-inch single flowers, energizes the summer garden right up to frost. Bushy, redstemmed plants (20 inches tall and wide) complete the vibrant picture.
- **6. Kismet® Yellow** (*E.* 'TNECHKY') also put on an amazing show with scores of vibrant golden yellow—not brassy—flowers from early summer to frost. The Kismet® Series offers heavy flower production, reliable first-year bloom, and compact habits.
- **7. 'Sensation Pink'** was one of the very best coneflowers in 2019, notable for vibrant magenta-pink flowers held on purple stems and a robust habit to 14 inches tall and wide. It blooms bountifully from early summer to frost; the flowers hold their color for a long time before fading to a pretty lavender-pink.















Richard Hawke is plant evaluation manager at the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, Illinois.

	NOIL			TOP	∞	PERFORMERS																														
	FLOWER TION PRODUCTION	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	fair	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	boog	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	
	BLOOM PERIOD	late spring to late summer	early summer to late summer	early summer to late summer	late spring to early autumn	late spring to early autumn	late spring to autumn	midspring to autumn	early summer to early autumn	early summer to late summer	late spring to late summer	early summer to early autumn	early summer to early autumn	early summer to late summer	late spring to late summer	late spring to late summer	early summer to late summer	late spring to late summer	early summer to early autumn	late spring to late summer	late spring to late summer	midspring to late summer	late spring to early autumn	late spring to late summer	late spring to late summer	early summer to late summer	late spring to late summer	late spring to late summer	late spring to late summer	late spring to late summer	late spring to early autumn	early summer to late summer	early summer to late summer	late spring to late autumn	early summer to early autumn	
	FLOWER	3 in.	3 in.	4 in.	3½ in.	3 in.	4 in.	3 in.	3½ in.	21/4 in.	4 in.	4 in.	3¼ in.	3½ in.	3 in.	3½ in.	3½ in.	4 in.	3½ in.	3 in.	4½ in.	2¼ in.	4 in.	4 in.	3¼ in.	3½ in.	3¼ in.	3½ in.	4 in.	4 in.	3½ in.	3 in.	4 in.	4 in.	4 in.	
VER TRIAL RESULTS	FLOWER COLOR	scarlet-red rays, dark cones	bright pink rays, orange cones	red-orange rays, dark cones	deep watermelon pink rays, orange cones	white rays, double	white rays and green cones	deep pink rays, orange cones	pink rays, burgundy-green cones	pink rays, orange cones	orange rays, dark cones	deep orange rays, dark cones	burgundy-red rays, dark cones	white rays, double	orange rays, double	dark magenta rays, black cones	dark orange rays and cones	bright orange and yellow rays, dark cones	white rays, golden cones	deep red-orange rays, double	light orange rays, orange cones	pink rays, orange cones	golden yellow rays, golden cones	orange rays, double	deep golden yellow rays, orange cones	bright yellow rays, orange cones	creamy white rays, double	pink rays, double	bright pink rays, double	palest yellow to creamy white rays	purple rays, orange-brown cones	white rays, greenish yellow cones	light yellow rays, golden cones	raspberry pink rays, double	dark orange rays, dark cones	
	MIDIM	24 in.	21 in.	42 in.	21 in.	33 in.	15 in.	24 in.	24 in.	15 in.	24 in.	22 in.	20 in.	24 in.	26 in.	14 in.	27 in.	34 in.	31 in.	22 in.	27 in.	23 in.	20 in.	32 in.	20 in.	18 in.	22 in.	24 in.	19 in.	30 in.	22 in.	25 in.	18 in.	18 in.	30 in.	
CONEFLOV	HEIGHT	16 in.	22 in.	29 in.	25 in.	31 in.	15 in.	32 in.	24 in.	14 in.	32 in.	24 in.	20 in.	24 in.	21 in.	16 in.	24 in.	28 in.	21 in.	22 in.	31 in.	20 in.	29 in.	30 in.	24 in.	22 in.	25 in.	25 in.	26 in.	23 in.	28 in.	22 in.	21 in.	30 in.	21 in.	
RATING KEY **** Excellent ** Fair **** Great	ECHINACEA	E. 'Balsomsed' (Sombrero® Salsa Red)	E. 'CBG Cone2' (Pixie Meadowbrite®)	E. 'Firebird'	E. 'Glowing Dream'	E. 'Milkshake'	E. 'Snow Cone'	E. purpurea 'Pica Bella'	E. tennesseensis	E. 'Adam Saul' (CRAZY PINΚ ^{τΜ})	E. 'Art's Pride' (Orange Meadowbrite®)	E. 'Balsomador' (Sombrero® Adobe Orange)	E. 'Balsombabur' (Sombrero® Baja Burgundy)	E. 'Champagne Bubbles'	E. 'Colorburst Orange'	E. 'Emily Saul' (Big Sky™ After Midnight)	E. 'Evan Saul' (Big Sky TM Sundown)	E. 'Flame Thrower'	E. 'Heavenly Dream'	E. 'Hot Papaya'	E. 'Katie Saul' (Big Sky™ Summer Sky)	E. 'Little Annie'	E. 'Mac 'n' Cheese'	E. 'Marmalade'	E. 'Matthew Saul' (Big Sky™ Harvest Moon)	E. 'Maui Sunshine'	E. 'Meringue'	E. 'Pink Double Delight'	E. 'Pink Poodle'	E. 'Pure Honey'	E. 'Purple Emperor'	E. 'Summer Snow Storm'	E. 'Sunrise' (Big Sky™ Sunrise)	E. 'Supreme Elegance'	E. 'Tangerine Dream'	
	RATING	****	****	****	****	****	****	****	****	***	***	****	****	****	***	***	****	***	***	****	****	****	***	****	***	****	****	****	****	****	****	****	****	***	***	

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| SOURCES | Digging Dog Nursery

Nursery Albion, CA 707-937-1130 diggingdog.com

Port Townsend, WA 360-385-5114 farreachesfam.com Lazy S's Farm Nursery Barhourswille VA

Lazy S's Farm Nursery Barboursville, W lazyssfarm.com Plant Delights Nursery Raleigh, NC 919-772-4794 plantdelights.com

****	E. 'Tiki Torch'	29 in.	25 in.	deep orange rays, red-brown cones	3½ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. 'Tomato Soup'	30 in.	24 in.	deep red rays, dark cones	3% in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. 'Twilight' (Big Sky TM Twilight)	14 in.	16 in.	coral red rays, red cones	3½ in.	early summer to late summer	fair
****	E. purpurea 'Alba'	30 in.	27 in.	white rays, orange cones	4 in.	late spring to autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Avalanche'	23 in.	18 in.	white rays, yellow-green cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Coconut Lime'	24 in.	24 in.	greenish white rays, double	3 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Cygnet White'	22 in.	19 in.	white rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Doubledecker'	40 in.	24 in.	pink rays, brown cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Fatal Attraction'	31 in.	27 in.	deep magenta-purple rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
***	E. purpurea 'Fragrant Angel'	29 in.	27 in.	white rays, yellow cones	5 in.	early summer to late summer	fair
****	E. purpurea 'Green Envy'	44 in.	39 in.	pink and green rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Green Eyes'	20 in.	14 in.	magenta rays, green to orange cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Green Jewel'	24 in.	24 in.	light green rays, dark green cones	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Hope'	25 in.	19 in.	soft pink rays, orange cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Jade'	25 in.	17 in.	white rays, dark green cones	3½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
***	E. purpurea 'Kim's Knee High'	18 in.	16 in.	pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Kim's Mop Head'	21 in.	16 in.	white rays, orange and green cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Lilliput'	16 in.	18 in.	rose-pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Lucky Star'	26 in.	21 in.	white rays, orange-yellow cones	3 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Magnus'	32 in.	30 in.	pink rays, orange cones	5 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Merlot'	31 in.	21 in.	rosy pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'PowWow Wild Berry'	22 in.	24 in.	deep purple-pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Prairie Frost'	29 in.	24 in.	purple-pink rays, dark cones	3 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Prairie Splendor'	24 in.	20 in.	rose-pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Primadonna Deep Pink'	30 in.	31 in.	rose-pink rays, dark cones	4½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Primadonna White'	25 in.	24 in.	white rays, orange-brown cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Purity'	27 in.	22 in.	white rays, golden orange cones	3 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
***	E. purpurea 'Razzmatazz'	33 in.	18 in.	pink rays, double	3½ in.	late spring to late summer	poob
****	E. purpurea 'Red Knee High'	28 in.	24 in.	bright rosy pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Rubinstern'	34 in.	34 in.	pink rays, dark cones	4½ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Ruby Giant'	36 in.	24 in.	purple-pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
***	E. purpurea 'Showoff'	32 in.	32 in.	bright pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Sparkler'	28 in.	22 in.	dark purple-pink rays, orange cones	3½ in.	late spring to autumn	fair
****	E. purpurea 'Verbesserter Leuchtstern'	47 in.	34 in.	purplish pink rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to mid-autumn	excellent
***	E. purpurea 'Vintage Wine'	26 in.	20 in.	deep magenta rays, brownish cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'Virgin'	24 in.	30 in.	white rays, green cones	4 in.	midspring to early autumn	excellent
****	E. purpurea 'White Showoff'	29 in.	28 in.	white rays, honey yellow cones	4 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
***	E. purpurea 'White Swan'	31 in.	22 in.	white rays, greenish cones	4 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
***	E. tennesseensis 'Rocky Top'	22 in.	20 in.	purple-pink rays, black cones	3½ in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
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