

GREEN-HEADED CONEFLOWER

Whenever the name Coneflower is mentioned, many people will probably think of the prairie forbs. However, not all Coneflowers are prairie forbs. One of these non-prairie forbs is the Green-headed Coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata* L.).

Green-headed Coneflower is a member of the Order *Asterales*, the Family *Asteraceae* or *Compositae*, the Subfamily *Asteroideae*, the Tribe *Heliantheae*, and the Subtribe *Rudbeckiinae*. The generic name, *Rudbeckia*, was named for the father and son Swedish botanists, Olaf J. Rudbeck and Olaf O. Rudbeck. The specific epithet, *laciniata*, is Latin for “deeply cut, lacerated, slashed, or torn”, referring to the leaves.

Other common names for this plant are Cone Disk, Cone-disk Sunflower, Coneflower, Cutleaf, Cutleaf Coneflower, Cut-leaved Coneflower, Floodplain Coneflower, Floodplain Sunflower, Goldenglow, Lance-leaved Coneflower, Slashed-leaf Coneflower, Tall Coneflower, Thimbleweed, and Wild Goldenglow. The Goldenglow is a special variety with double petals.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GREEN-HEADED CONEFLOWER

Perennial

Height: Green-headed Coneflowers are about 2-12 feet tall.

Stem: Their stems are single or many, light blue-green, smooth and waxy or with short stiff hairs, and are branched near the top.

Leaves: The leaves are alternate, widely spaced, pinnately compound, and are irregularly divided into 3-7 leaflets or segments. The lower leaves have coarsely-toothed margins and are more lobed and divided. The upper leaves may have entire margins and may be undivided. The petioles are up to 6 inches long on the lower leaves and are shorter to sessile on the upper leaves. The lower leaves may be up to 10 inches long and up to 6 inches wide. Their undersides are smooth to hairy.

These leaves are hosts to larvae of a few species of butterflies and moths. Some of these species are Silvery Checkerspot (*Chlosyne nycteis* Doubleday), Wavy-lined Emerald Moth (*Synchlora aerata* Fabricus), and Common Eupithecia (*Eupithecia miserulata* Grote).

Flowers: The flower heads are terminally arranged and are in clusters of a few to several. Each flower head is radially symmetrical; about 1¼-4 inches wide; has fertile, green-yellow to gray, domed, ½-¾ inches wide, tubular disk flowers; and about 6-16 sterile, 1-2¼ inches long, drooping golden yellow ray flowers. When the flowers mature, the disk flowers elongate and the ray flowers continue drooping. The 8 or more subtending involucre bracts are of unequal lengths, are bent downward, and have white hairs at their tips. The receptacles are rounded to cylindrical. Flowering season is June to November.

These flowers are insect-pollinated. Various species of Bees (*Anthophilia*), Butterflies and Moths (*Lepidoptera*), and Flies (*Diptera*) will visit these flowers.

Fruit: The fruits are 4-angled, longitudinally ribbed, flattened, dry, purple to dark brown, single-seeded achenes with a short, 4-toothed, and non-fluffy pappus. Common Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis* L.) and other birds will eat these seeds. Unlike other

members of the Genus *Rudbeckia*, which have dark seed heads, these seed heads are gray.

Roots: Their roots are slightly woody, fibrous, and fleshy. New plants can sprout from their long rhizomes.

Habitat: Green-headed Coneflowers inhabit floodplain forests, swamps, stream banks, moist thickets, and ditches. They can tolerate partial or full shade. These flowers may form into small patches.

Range: Green-headed Coneflowers inhabit most of the U.S. except the Pacific Coast.

Uses:

Green-headed Coneflowers had numerous uses as food and as medicine. Both the Native Americans and the early European settlers used this plant.

A root tea infusion was made for treating worms and indigestion. The flowers were used as a poultice for treating burns. This plant was sometimes rubbed upon the legs and chests of horses to boost their energy. This plant was once sold commercially as a diuretic and as a tonic for urinary catarrh and Bright's disease.

The young or dried leaves, shots, and stems are edible. They can be eaten raw or cooked. The stems can be dried for future uses. The cooked spring leaves were eaten for "good health".

The plant had other uses as well. The flowers were sometimes used as a green dye.

This plant was one of the earliest American species to be exported to England. In 1640, this plant was growing in the garden of England's King Charles I.

Toxicity:

Despite the edible and medicinal uses of this plant, all of the parts above the ground are slightly toxic, especially to livestock. Its toxin is unidentified. Consumption of this plant may lead to lack of coordination, dullness, listlessness, abdominal pains, increased respiration, convulsions, and even death.

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