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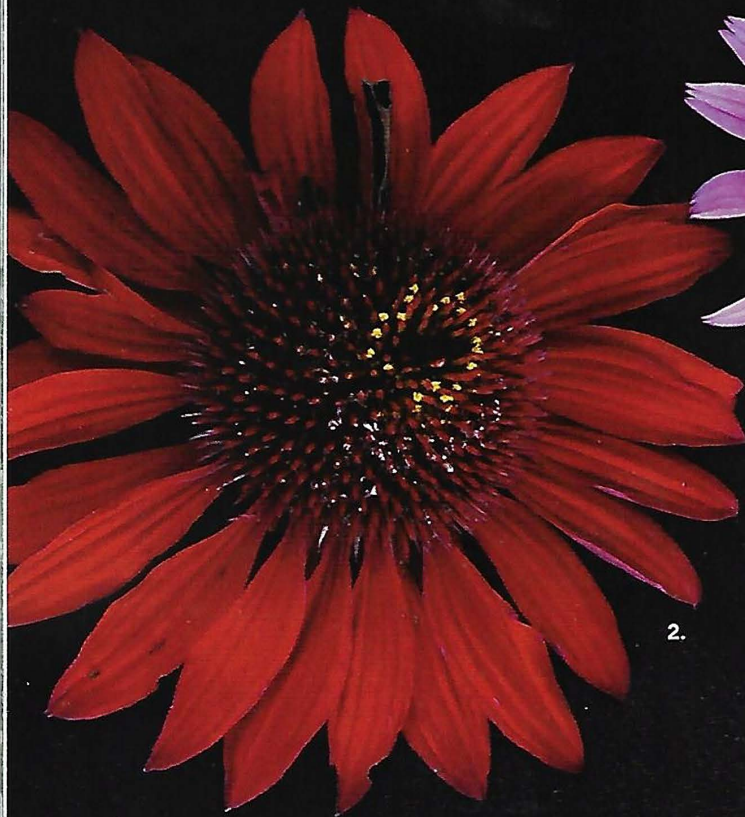
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What's new with Coneflowers?

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'

The following coneflowers are not necessarily brand-new, 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. tenesseeensis*, and *E. laevigata*. This three-way hybrid combines all the best aspects of each parent.

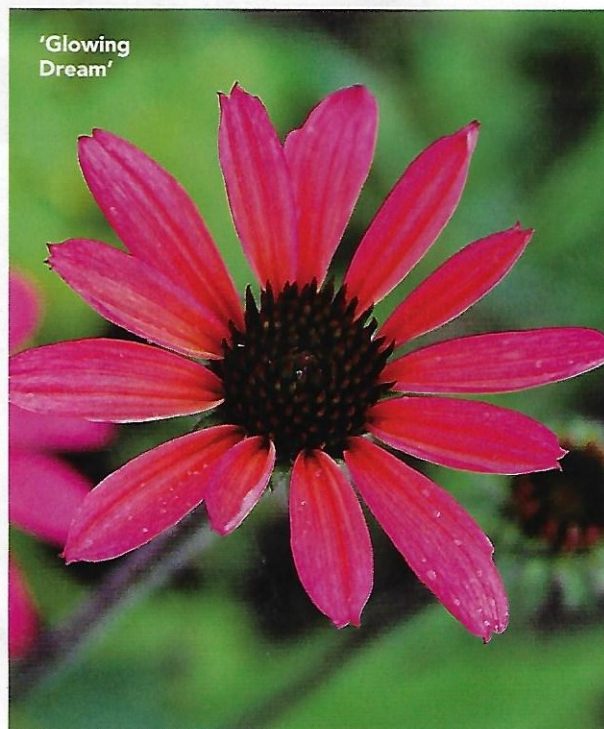
It's probably safe to say that double coneflowers are not for everyone. The floral architecture is too fussy or unnatural for some, while those keen on pollinators don't much care for them. I get it—my love is conditional too. **'Milkshake'** received top marks for its habit as much as its double flowers, 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



'Firebird'

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.

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 can occur**

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).



Tennessee coneflower

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 **Lakota™ 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 3½-inch flowers feature nearly flat rays. Lakota™ 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 Butterfly™ 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, red-stemmed 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.

RATING	ECHINACEA	HEIGHT	WIDTH	FLOWER COLOR	FLOWER SIZE	BLOOM PERIOD	FLOWER PRODUCTION
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Balsomsed' (Sombrero® Salsa Red)	16 in.	24 in.	scarlet-red rays, dark cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'CBG Cone2' (Pixie Meadowbrite®)	22 in.	21 in.	bright pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Firebird'	29 in.	42 in.	red-orange rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Glowing Dream'	25 in.	21 in.	deep watermelon pink rays, orange cones	3½ in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Milkshake'	31 in.	33 in.	white rays, double	3 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Snow Cone'	15 in.	15 in.	white rays and green cones	4 in.	late spring to autumn	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Pica Bella'	32 in.	24 in.	deep pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	midspring to autumn	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E. tennesseensis</i>	24 in.	24 in.	pink rays, burgundy-green cones	3½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Adam Saul' (CRAZY PINK™)	14 in.	15 in.	pink rays, orange cones	2¼ in.	early summer to late summer	fair
★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Art's Pride' (Orange Meadowbrite®)	32 in.	24 in.	orange rays, dark cones	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Balsomador' (Sombrero® Adobe Orange)	24 in.	22 in.	deep orange rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Balsombabur' (Sombrero® Baja Burgundy)	20 in.	20 in.	burgundy-red rays, dark cones	¾ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Champagne Bubbles'	24 in.	24 in.	white rays, double	¾ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Colorburst Orange'	21 in.	26 in.	orange rays, double	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Emily Saul' (Big Sky™ After Midnight)	16 in.	14 in.	dark magenta rays, black cones	¾ in.	late spring to late summer	good
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Evan Saul' (Big Sky™ Sundown)	24 in.	27 in.	dark orange rays and cones	¾ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Flame Thrower'	28 in.	34 in.	bright orange and yellow rays, dark cones	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Heavenly Dream'	21 in.	31 in.	white rays, golden cones	¾ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Hot Papaya'	22 in.	22 in.	deep red-orange rays, double	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Katie Saul' (Big Sky™ Summer Sky)	31 in.	27 in.	light orange rays, orange cones	½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Little Annie'	20 in.	23 in.	pink rays, orange cones	¼ in.	midspring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Mac 'n' Cheese'	29 in.	20 in.	golden yellow rays, golden cones	4 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Marmalade'	30 in.	32 in.	orange rays, double	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Matthew Saul' (Big Sky™ Harvest Moon)	24 in.	20 in.	deep golden yellow rays, orange cones	¾ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Maui Sunshine'	22 in.	18 in.	bright yellow rays, orange cones	¾ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Meringue'	25 in.	22 in.	creamy white rays, double	¾ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Pink Double Delight'	25 in.	24 in.	pink rays, double	¾ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Pink Poodle'	26 in.	19 in.	bright pink rays, double	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Pure Honey'	23 in.	30 in.	palest yellow to creamy white rays	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Purple Emperor'	28 in.	22 in.	purple rays, orange-brown cones	¾ in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Summer Snow Storm'	22 in.	25 in.	white rays, greenish yellow cones	3 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Sunrise' (Big Sky™ Sunrise)	21 in.	18 in.	light yellow rays, golden cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Supreme Elegance'	30 in.	18 in.	raspberry pink rays, double	4 in.	late spring to late autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Tangerine Dream'	21 in.	30 in.	dark orange rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent

TOP
8
PERFORMERS

★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Tiki Torch'	29 in.	25 in.	deep orange rays, red-brown cones	3½ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Tomato Soup'	30 in.	24 in.	deep red rays, dark cones	3¾ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E.</i> 'Twilight' (Big Sky™ Twilight)	14 in.	16 in.	coral red rays, red cones	3½ in.	early summer to late summer	fair
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Alba'	30 in.	27 in.	white rays, orange cones	4 in.	late spring to autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Avalanche'	23 in.	18 in.	white rays, yellow-green cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Coconut Lime'	24 in.	24 in.	greenish white rays, double	3 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Cygnet White'	22 in.	19 in.	white rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Doubledecker'	40 in.	24 in.	pink rays, brown cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Fatal Attraction'	31 in.	27 in.	deep magenta-purple rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Fragrant Angel'	29 in.	27 in.	white rays, yellow cones	5 in.	early summer to late summer	fair
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Green Envy'	44 in.	39 in.	pink and green rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Green Eyes'	20 in.	14 in.	magenta rays, green to orange cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Green Jewel'	24 in.	24 in.	light green rays, dark green cones	4 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Hope'	25 in.	19 in.	soft pink rays, orange cones	4 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Jade'	25 in.	17 in.	white rays, dark green cones	3½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Kim's Knee High'	18 in.	16 in.	pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Kim's Mop Head'	21 in.	16 in.	white rays, orange and green cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Lilliput'	16 in.	18 in.	rose-pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Lucky Star'	26 in.	21 in.	white rays, orange-yellow cones	3 in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Magnus'	32 in.	30 in.	pink rays, orange cones	5 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Merlot'	31 in.	21 in.	rosy pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'PowWow Wild Berry'	22 in.	24 in.	deep purple-pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Prairie Frost'	29 in.	24 in.	purple-pink rays, dark cones	3 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Prairie Splendor'	24 in.	20 in.	rose-pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Primadonna Deep Pink'	30 in.	31 in.	rose-pink rays, dark cones	4½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Primadonna White'	25 in.	24 in.	white rays, orange-brown cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Purity'	27 in.	22 in.	white rays, golden orange cones	3 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Razzmatazz'	33 in.	18 in.	pink rays, double	3½ in.	late spring to late summer	good
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Red Knee High'	28 in.	24 in.	bright rosy pink rays, orange cones	3 in.	late spring to autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Rubinstern'	34 in.	34 in.	pink rays, dark cones	4½ in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Ruby Giant'	36 in.	24 in.	purple-pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	early summer to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Showoff'	32 in.	32 in.	bright pink rays, orange cones	4½ in.	late spring to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Sparkler'	28 in.	22 in.	dark purple-pink rays, orange cones	3½ in.	late spring to autumn	fair
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Verbesserter Leuchtstern'	47 in.	34 in.	purplish pink rays, dark cones	4 in.	early summer to mid-autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Vintage Wine'	26 in.	20 in.	deep magenta rays, brownish cones	4 in.	early summer to late summer	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'Virgin'	24 in.	30 in.	white rays, green cones	4 in.	midspring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'White Showoff'	29 in.	28 in.	white rays, honey yellow cones	4 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★★	<i>E. purpurea</i> 'White Swan'	31 in.	22 in.	white rays, greenish cones	4 in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent
★★★	<i>E. tennesseensis</i> 'Rocky Top'	22 in.	20 in.	purple-pink rays, black cones	3½ in.	late spring to early autumn	excellent

| SOURCES |

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

Far Reaches Farm
Port Townsend, WA
360-385-5114
farreachesfarm.com

Lazy S's Farm Nursery
Barboursville, VA
lazysfarm.com

Plant Delights Nursery
Raleigh, NC
919-772-4794
plantdelights.com