



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Prairie Coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*)



A composite flower head with yellow ray flowers and dark brown disk flowers arranged along a column

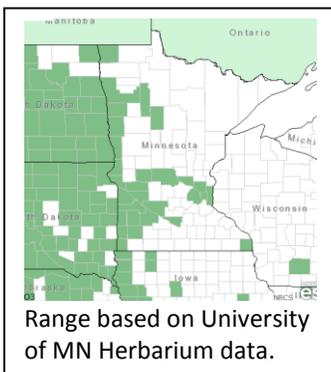
This robust plant adds beauty to gardens and prairie plantings. With its distinctive central disk, the Prairie Coneflower introduces color and texture to the landscape. The petals can range in color from a bright yellow, to a dark, rich orange. It can be found in prairies and savannas around the Great Plains of the United States. Pollinators and a variety of other wildlife species use Prairie Coneflower for food and shelter.

Identification

Prairie Coneflower is a herbaceous perennial in the Aster family that grows to about 1.5 feet tall. It has pinnately divided leaves that have many narrow segments. The sections of the leaves are linear to lance-like in shape and the margins are smooth. Both leaves and stems are covered in small white hairs

that give the plant a grayish look. The flowers grow singly on long stalks and there are several flower stalks per individual plant. The flowers contain both disk and ray flowers. The ray flowers have long droopy petals. The petals are notched at the tip and range in color from plain yellow to stripes of deep orange. There can be between four and eleven petals per flower. The disk in the middle of the flower is dark brown and columnar in shape (up to 1.5 inches long). Both the foliage and the flowers are fragrant, smelling slightly of anise. The central disk becomes a head of small, winged seeds.

Range



Prairie Coneflower is relatively widespread across the United States. It is distributed from Alberta to Mexico, east to Minnesota and Illinois and west to Montana and Arizona. Within Minnesota it is considered native in the western half of the state. Prairie Coneflower prefers dryer, well-drained soils. It can be found in dry and mesic prairies, pastures, savannas, and roadsides. Prairie Coneflower is adapted to many soil types, pH levels, and precipitation amounts and can establish through seed dispersal.

Statewide Wetland Indicator Status:

- UPL



Prairie coneflower is common in dry and mesic prairies.



Finely divided leaves of Prairie Coneflower

Uses

Native Americans used Prairie Coneflower to treat pain, poison ivy rashes, and rattlesnake bites. An infusion made from the flowers was used for a variety of ailments including headaches, coughs, stomachaches, and to induce vomiting. Native Americans also used the leaves and ripened flower heads to make a tea. Large game animals eat the species while grazing and the seeds are eaten by a variety of small mammals and birds. Prairie Coneflower is commonly used in restoration and stormwater BMP projects because it is pollinator friendly, low maintenance, and has attractive flowers.

Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Stabilization
- Aesthetics

Planting Recommendations

Planting Methods

- Seed
- Containers

The species can be planted by seed or containerized plants. The seeds are black or dark gray and have flattened achenes. The species germinates reliably from seed and can bloom in the first season if started in early spring. Seeds

collected from the long narrow center disk (cone) should be collected in late July or August, as soon as they are dry. A moist stratification with a soil temperature of approximately 79 degrees are the best conditions for germination. The seeds can easily be grown in indoor or greenhouse plots or planted on site. The soil surface should be weed-free with 1 to 2 inches of top soil loosened. Broadcast the seed on the soil surface and then lightly rake (or cover) the seeded area to increase soil to seed contact. The soil should be kept moist until germination and the seedlings should be watered until established.



Similar Species



Yellow Coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*) can grow up to four feet tall and have a central disk that is smaller, more rounded, and thinner than Prairie Coneflower. The petals are almost always a bright yellow color whereas the Prairie Coneflower petals can range from light yellow to dark orange.



Green Headed Coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*) is found in moist habitats and can grow between 3 to 8 feet tall with leaves up to 12 inches long and 12 inches across. The central cone is light green in color.

References

Minnesota Wildflowers <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/prairie-coneflower>

USDA Plants Database: <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=RACO3>