

PLANT CORNER

Welcome to another year of the Plant Corner, a series of profiles of STAR PERFORMERS among perennial garden plants from the folks at Chaska Farm & Garden.



Echinacea 'Tiki Torch' Coneflower

Each year comes a cornucopia of new plant varieties to offer. They come so fast we barely get time to try them before they fill our benches for sale.

We have seen a flurry of new echinacea coneflowers. Where we once had only purple and white we now have shades of coral, yellow, orange and near-red. And where we have traditionally recognized this daisy species by the dark raised button center of their flower, some new varieties look more like a carnation full of petals or even a clipped poodle.

Coneflowers are a good palette to play on. Their parent is our prairie native *Echinacea purpurea* that is to the mid-summer garden what tulips are to spring. Coneflowers are long-blooming, their individual flowers last for weeks, and they continue to bloom late. Their flowers are large and loud, extremely attractive to butterflies and other lovers of nectar. And if left to stand over winter the cone heads provide seeds to Goldfinches and other seed-eating birds.

Gardeners in our area will be glad to hear that coneflowers tolerate clay soils as well as more hospitable sites and can manage on dry sites. They do their best in full sun like their prairie parent. Standard height is about 3 ft.

But back to the color thing, that's what really puts this plant in our gardens. Of the new colors yellow is the big yawn, there are too many easy ways to get yellow even with leaf colors. More interesting is orange and 'Tiki Torch' just screams orange, intense no-mud orange, no argument it's any other color. 'Tiki Torch' is not the first orange echinacea, just head-and-shoulders hotter. But then it is as hard to describe this orange without a color picture as it is to rhyme orange!

To me it is the intense yellows, reds and oranges that define the heat of mid-summer. The busy pace of a full-sun mid-summer garden makes even winter almost tolerable.

— Tom

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