



Little metalmark on Black-eyed Susan

Rudbeckia species are commonly known as Black-eyed Susans or coneflowers. The most widely available native is Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*). It is found throughout Florida in sandhills, flatwoods and disturbed areas, including the variety *Rudbeckia hirta* var. *floridana*, endemic to Central and South Florida.

Softhair coneflower (*R. mollis*) and Cutleaf coneflower (*R. laciniata*) can be used successfully throughout the Panhandle and in North and Central Florida.

Description

Black-eyed Susan, especially the variety found in Central and South Florida, appears to be perennial. However, varieties may be annual, biennial or perennial. Plants are generally 1 to 2 feet tall with most of the foliage on the bottom half. Leaves are very rough to the touch (which can help identify young plants). The 3- to 4-inch deep-yellow aster-like flowers have dark brown disk flowers in a central dome. *Rudbeckia* blooms spring through fall, and has scattered blooms through the winter in South Florida.

Softhair coneflower is annual or biennial, with soft, almost velvety hairs on plants that reach 3 feet or more when flowering. The 2½-inch flowerheads are similar to Black-eyed Susan. They have showy ray florets, but the disk is flattened and brown or purplish. Softhair coneflower is a robust plant that can have 30 flowers open at a time from late spring through summer. It naturally occurs in sandhills and open hammocks, so plant it in sandy, well-drained soils, and mix it with other species where its height is a welcome addition to the landscape.

Cutleaf coneflower is a large perennial reaching 4 to 6 feet tall and up to 4 feet

across when in full bloom in late summer and fall. Found in moist, open hammocks and floodplains of North Florida, it prefers moist settings and may need a little more shade or protection from the west sun when used in Central Florida. The lower leaves are toothed and deeply dissected. The large flowers stand 2 to 4 feet above the last leaves and have long yellow ray florets spreading from the mounding disk with greenish yellow florets. Cutleaf coneflower's very beautiful rosette of large, rich green leaves can be seen through much of the year, making a fine mass planting.

Planting

Use Black-eyed Susans in mixed wildflower beds. This and most other *Rudbeckia* species easily self-seed if open or lightly mulched areas are available.

Space Black-eyed Susans and Softhair coneflower 14 to 18 inches apart. Space Cutleaf coneflower about 3 feet apart.

Butterflies and bees

These plants are excellent nectar sources and are also larval hosts to some moths.

Seeds

Seeds can be collected after the ray and disk flowers finish blooming and have dried slightly. Pick a head and tear it apart to find the mature cone-shaped seeds, which should have solid white centers. Seeds can be purchased commercially.



Black-eyed Susan

Plants

Plants are available in gallon containers from native nurseries.

When buying at mainstream retail outlets, be sure to ask about the origin of the plant (see Caution).

Care

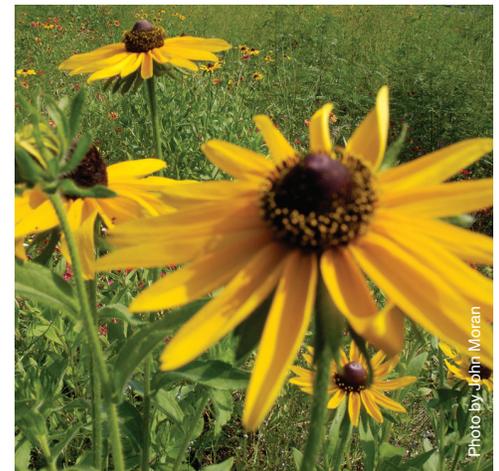
Monitor plants during extra-long dry periods, especially in spring, and water deeply only as needed. Black-eyed Susan flowers can be cut after they bloom to encourage more flowering stems and lengthen the bloom period.

Site conditions

This plant does well in many soil types as long as the site is well-drained and not extremely dry. Give *Rudbeckia* full sun or partial shade for the best blooming.

Hardiness zones

Black-eyed Susan is best suited for zones 8A–11. Softhair and Cutleaf coneflower are suited for zones 8A–9A.



Softhair coneflower

There are many named cultivars of *Rudbeckia* species, and some are quite popular and widely available.

None of the cultivars currently available were derived from Florida ecotypes, and they are not considered native wildflowers. They may not perform as well or live as long as those from your local region.

CAUTION