

Softhair coneflower

(*Rudbeckia mollis*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Softhair coneflower is a robust plant with bright yellow blooms that provide late spring and summer color to sandhills, dry open hammocks and roadsides in North and Central Florida. Butterflies and Halictid bees nectar on the flowers, while small birds enjoy eating the seeds.

Softhair coneflower's terminal blooms are comprised of many long yellow ray florets that typically arch downward, giving the flower its eponymous cone shape.

Center disk florets are purplish-brown, flat and densely packed. Bracts are lanceolate and pubescent. Basal leaves are large (2–3 inches long), have toothed margins, and are covered in tiny hairs, giving them a grayish-green hue. They are arranged in a rosette. Stem leaves are sessile and elliptic to spatulate with toothed margins (occasionally entire). Arrangement is alternate. Stems are rigid and covered in tiny hairs. Upper stems are branched. Seeds are born in achenes.

The genus name *Rudbeckia* is an homage to Oluf Rudbeck the Younger (1660–1740) and his father, Oluf Rudbeck the Elder (1630–1702), both of whom were Swedish botanists and professors of Carl Linnaeus, the father of modern taxonomy.

Family: Asteraceae (Aster, composite or daisy family)

Native range: Panhandle, north and central peninsula

To see where natural populations of Softhair coneflower have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–9B

Lifespan: Biennial (may act as annual or short-lived perennial)

Soil: Moderately moist to dry, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to minimal shade

Growth habit: Up to 4' tall

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: Use Softhair coneflower in a mixed wildflower planting or in the back of a planting where its height can be appreciated. It is drought tolerant and requires little to no maintenance once established. It does not tolerate prolonged shade. Although the plant typically perishes after it blooms, it is a prolific self-seeder and can produce many seedlings. Seeds can be collected from dry seedheads. Sow in trays or spread in open sandy areas and lightly cover with pine straw.

Softhair coneflower is often available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area. Seeds also are available through the Florida Wildflowers Growers Cooperative at www.FloridaWildflowers.com.



Photo by Keith Bradley