

Echinacea purpurea or Echinacea angustifolia

by Karen Unruh

Yes, colds and the flu are upon us. We can benefit from echinacea – *Echinacea purpurea*– a good reason to think about including this plant in your garden this year, if you don't have it already. *Echinacea angustifolia* is often grown and sold as the medicinal echinacea and grows wild in Central North America. However, wild harvesting is causing the plant to become extinct so herbal farmers grow both types of echinacea as they are equally valuable herbally. All parts of the plant can enhance immune function. Echinacea works by increasing macrophage T-cell activity, thereby boosting the body's first line of defense against colds and the flu. It is potent and strong, yet safe for children, the elderly and everyone between. That is why you see echinacea in health food stores and pharmacies, usually as a tea or tincture, with instructions to use often and regularly at the first hint of a cold or flu.

A tincture is a concentrated liquid extract of the herb. It is potent and taken by the dropperful, most often diluted in water. Most tinctures are made with alcohol as the primary solvent. Effective tinctures can also be made with vegetable glycerin although they are not as strong as an alcohol-based tincture. I am not giving the directions for making tinctures as it is more precise and lengthy than my recipes for this column. Besides, echinacea tincture is widely available commercially. Herbalist Rosemary Gladstar, with whom I had the privilege to study for a couple of days, recommends warding off a cold by taking 1/2 teaspoon of echinacea tincture every 30 minutes at the first sign of infection. If you already have a cold, take 1 teaspoon of tincture every 2 hours. Persons who have an allergy to plants in the Aster family will need to avoid this remedy.

I hope that you have *E. purpurea*, the cultivated echinacea, growing in your garden. It is a handsome garden perennial, commonly known as Purple Coneflower, growing 1 metre high with long mauve/pink single honey-scented petals and a spiky central core. The leaves are oval, narrow, dark green and deeply veined. In the late summer you could dry some of the flowers, leaves and rhizome too, if you wish, to be ready to make this throat soothing tea. The tea also contains Licorice Root, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, which is sweet tasting, with a soothing anti-inflammatory quality. Also, Cinnamon, *Cinnamomum cassia* and Ginger, *Zingiber officinale*, add taste and healing qualities. Marsh Mallow root, *Althaea officinalis*, adds more soothing quality to the tea. All the ingredients are available dried at Heaven on Earth health food store in Qualicum.



Echinacea Throat Soother Tea

1/3 cup licorice root pieces

OR 1/4 cup powdered licorice root

1/4 cup echinacea pieces

1/4 cup marshmallow root pieces

OR 2 tablespoons powdered marshmallow root

2 tablespoons broken cinnamon sticks

OR 1 tablespoon powdered cinnamon

1 tablespoon ground fresh ginger root

OR 2 teaspoons powdered ginger

As roots, bark and stems are ingredients for this recipe, we call this a decoction. It is harder to extract the constituents from these parts so a slow simmer is required. Place the herbs in a saucepan and cover well with cold water. Heat slowly and simmer, covered, for 20 to 45 minutes. The longer you simmer the herbs, the stronger the tea will be. Strain through a fine sieve. Enjoy the aroma of this herbal tea in your kitchen.

Drink several cups of tea a day to ease the symptoms of a cold or flu to help you get well quickly.