

AAS Seed Trial - Echinacea, Cheyenne Spirit



How could a bouquet of Echinacea (Cone Flower) NOT lift spirits and bring a smile to any face?

I was so excited to see this flower as a choice in the AAS Seed Trials. I love cone flowers. They are so easy and so tough and handle almost any hot and dry condition; are always beautiful and make such lovely bouquets. I thought it would be a 'piece of cake' to grow these. They get rave reviews:

This stunning first-year flowering Echinacea captures the spirit of the North American plains by producing a delightful mix of flower colors from rich purple, pink, red and orange tones to lighter yellows, creams and white. This wide range of flower colors on well branched, durable plants are sure to please the color preferences of any gardener. As an added bonus, 'Cheyenne Spirit' does not require a lot of water and offers a wide range of uses from the perennial border, in a mass landscape planting, in a butterfly garden or as a cut flower. The AAS judges and their trial garden visitors raved about the attractiveness of the flowers and the range of colors while appreciating its sturdiness and low water needs. Even during wind and rain, this compact plant does not topple over like many Echinacea. The variety of intense, bright colors adds sparkle to the garden from mid-summer through fall. As an added bonus, this maintenance-free Echinacea doesn't even need deadheading to provide summer long beauty. Cheyenne Spirit is also a recipient of Europe's FleuroSelect Gold Medal award for garden performance.

However, yet another gardening lesson to be learned!

The growing instructions read:

How to Grow

All Echinacea are perennials and native to the American prairie. To produce plants from seed that will flower the first year, sow seed no later than January 25, regardless of location. Sow seed on top of germination media that has been thoroughly wet and allowed to drain. Seed can be exposed to light or covered lightly with media. Maintain 65F to 70F soil media for 10 to 15 days, the length of time for germination. Seedlings can be transplanted

into larger containers within 20 to 28 days. Transplant into a full-sun garden location with amended soil that is well draining. Plants thrive with few disease or insect problems.

We sowed two seeds per pot. Of the 10 pots, 2 seeds germinated. They struggled and even with extra care (too late), they died.

Why the failure? I believe the germination conditions were simply too hot and dry for seeds to germinate. Those that did germinate struggled in the heat. They had no chance to even grow a true set of leaves.

What to do differently? Sow seeds in growing medium that had been thoroughly watered and allowed to drain. Do NOT set in full sun to germinate. Ensure that seeds and growing medium are kept evenly moist.