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Echinacea

National Cancer Institute

Source

National Cancer Institute. *Echinacea*. NCI Thesaurus. Code C54160.

A genus of nine species of flowering plants in the Family Asteraceae, all native to eastern North America. These are herbaceous, drought-tolerant perennial plants growing to 1 or 2 m in height. The leaves are lanceolate to elliptic, 10-20 cm long and 1.5-10 cm broad. Like all Asteraceae, the flowers are a composite inflorescence, with purple (rarely yellow or white) florets arranged in a prominent, somewhat cone-shaped head; "cone-shaped" because the petals of the outer ray florets, once the flower head opens, tend to point downward (are decumbent), thus forming a cone. Extracts from the plants, especially *Echinacea angustifolia*, *Echinacea pallida*, and *Echinacea purpurea*, increase the non-specific activity of the immune system.