



## Echinacea

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*This Agriculture Note provides information on Echinacea and the industry.*

### Product

There are several species of Echinacea. The most popular, but hardest to grow is narrow-leaf Echinacea a native of mid - western and south western USA. It has been collected by native Americans for centuries and used as treatment for snakebite. In recent times it has become popular as a herbal medicine, for stimulating the immune system. Narrow-leaf Echinacea (*E. angustifolia*) is the most popular species with herbalists because it is considered to be the most potent. It is mainly gathered from the wild in the USA, and increased use is depleting wild stocks and increasing prices. Natural health industry sources claim that substitution of other root products is common.

The seed is sometimes marketed, as it is the most potent part of the plant, but the main product is the root. Echinacea root is sometimes used as a herbal tea infusion, but it is mainly used in the manufacture of liquid medicines. Broad - leaf Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*) has similar properties to the Narrow - leaf although it is not generally considered to be as potent. It is a native of north eastern North America and is easier to grow. The whole plant is used in tincture form (extract produced by soaking the plant in an alcohol/water mixture), and dried root is also used instead of narrow-leafed Echinacea. Broad-leaf Echinacea is sometimes also grown for the cut flower market.

### Physical Requirements

Echinacea will grow in a variety of climates, but it prefers hot dry summers. In its native climate winters are very cold, and summers hot. Both varieties prefer full sunlight and good drainage. Narrow-leafed Echinacea will not tolerate wet feet, even for brief periods, while the Broad-leafed variety is more tolerant. Some literature suggests that Echinacea thrives in poor, dry, low nitrogen soils, while other sources state soils should be fertile.

### Production

Echinacea can be grown by division of mature clumps, or from seed. Seeds are slow to germinate, and need cold stress to get them going. Part of the crop should be kept, to propagate new plants by root division.

The depletion of wild supplies of Narrow-leafed Echinacea in the United States, has led to an increase in demand for it to be cultivated, but it does not grow as well as the Broad-leafed variety. It is slow growing, low yielding and it is susceptible to root rot. Because it is adapted to a semi-arid habitat, with deep roots and leathery leaves this variety doesn't seem to respond to cultivation and the application of moisture and nutrients.

Broad-leafed Echinacea is the easiest species to grow. It is easier to germinate or propagate and get started. Because it comes from a wetter region than the other Echinacea species it has more abundant foliage, grows taller but has a shallower root system. Broad-leafed Echinacea grows well under cultivation, and it responds vigorously to both nutrients and moisture. Broad-leafed Echinacea is a perennial, but its production starts to decline after the second year so it should be replanted. It can be propagated by root division, but unlike the Narrow-leafed variety it is better if grown from seed.

Crops grown in Northern New South Wales under contract, were hand planted after mechanical seed bed preparation. They were harvested by digging with a garden fork. Because Broad-leafed Echinacea is shallow rooted, mechanical harvesting should be possible.

### Marketing

Some of the Echinacea grown in Australia is used fresh by manufacturers, but it is a limited market which should be assured before committing yourself to production. Echinacea has been successfully grown on the North Coast of New South Wales under licence to Herb Farms Australia, who supplied Blackmores an international health product company. The Australian market is currently being met by existing growers, and the size or potential of export markets have not been adequately assessed. Because large-scale production of Echinacea is quite straightforward and an oversupply situation could easily occur, as happened with aloe vera in the 1980s.

### Financial aspects

The dried root of *E. purpurea* is not considered to be as good as that of Narrow-leaf (*E. angustifolia*), but demand is increasing as *E. angustifolia* becomes harder to get. There is limited market for dried seed in Australia at the moment.

## Organisations and contacts

### [Organic herb growers of Australia Inc](#)

Culinary and medicinal herbs.

PO Box 6171, Sth. Lismore NSW 2480.

Phone: 066 291 057.

E-mail: [admin@organicherbs.org](mailto:admin@organicherbs.org)

Australian Commercial Herb Growers Association

Doug Moulden, Secretary

Phone: 03 5452 0228

## References

Australian Herb Industry Resource Guide, by Kim Fletcher. Published by Focus on Herbs Consultancy & Information Service,

PO Box 203, Launceston, Tas 7250.

Phone: 03 6330 1493

E-mail : [admin@focusonherbs.com.au](mailto:admin@focusonherbs.com.au)

Updated every 2 years. Lists businesses and associations from all of Australia associated with the herb industry.

Whitten, Greg 1997, Herbal Harvest, [Agmedia](#) 1997.

Major reference on commercial production of quality dried herbs.

Town and Country farmer, Winter 1997 Vol.14 No.2

Article - Echinacea Herb with a Future.

[Commercial Production of Medicinal Herbs](#) , RIRDC Dec 1999 Publication No. 99/149

[Echinacea angustifolia in South East Queensland](#), New Crop Newsletter, Issue 8, July 1997

Weed management in Echinacea: an organic growers perspective, BFA News, Issuer 46, Autumn 2001

### [Medi Herb Australian Growers Guide](#)

MediHerb

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