

Wildflower in Focus

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Black-eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta L.

Aster or Daisy Family (*Asteraceae*)



Rudbeckia hirta • Black-eyed Susan

Tina Thieme Brown ©2007

The black-eyed Susan is Maryland's state flower and one of our most striking summer wildflowers, blooming in meadows and fields and along roadsides throughout the state. This plant is a member of the aster or daisy family, a large and highly evolved family of plants. The black-eyed Susan "flowers" are actually flower heads. Each individual "petal" is a ray flower and the chocolate center of the flower head contains many small disk flowers.

Flower Heads: Rays (8 - 21) are a strong, sunny, golden-yellow surrounding a brown cone of disk flowers. Flower heads 1 1/2 - 4" across, borne singly on a long bristly stalk.

Leaves: Alternate, simple, soft and very bristly - hairy, with smooth margins or an occasional stray tooth.

Lanceolate to oblong, upper leaves sessile, lower ones sometimes petioled, 1 1/2 - 6 1/2" long.

Height and Growth Habit: 1 - 3'. Usually single-stalked, but some plants growing along the roadsides develop multiple stalks after they have been mowed.

Habitat and Range: Meadows, fields, roadsides, clearings; most of U.S., southern Canada and into Mexico.

Herbal Lore: According to Steven Foster and James Duke (Peterson Field Guides' Field Guide to Medicinal Plants: Eastern and Central North America), American Indians used the root tea to treat colds and expel worms and externally as a wash for swelling, body sores and snakebite. They report that the root juice was used for earaches. They also warn that some people's skin is sensitive to the touch of the plant.

Similar Species: Three-lobed (or thin-leaved) coneflower (*R. triloba*) has a branched growth habit and its lowest leaves are usually three-lobed. (Note: Black-eyed Susan may be branching after it has been mowed.) Orange coneflower (*R. fulgida*) blooms in the Piedmont and mountains from late summer through fall. It has slightly smaller flower heads than black-eyed Susan. According to Maryland Native Plant Society President Cris Fleming, both species are on the watch list in Maryland and are unlikely to be seen.

Blooming Time: June - October.

Locations: Abundant in fields, meadows, clearings and roadsides throughout the state.

Wildflower in Focus text adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press).