

Ask Sue



Photo by Robin Victor Goetz/RVGR

How to grow sweet peas; when to mulch landscaped beds; and recognizing coneflowers.



Q: I haven't had any luck growing my favorite flowers—sweet peas. Can you give me any pointers?
- Barbara, via e-mail

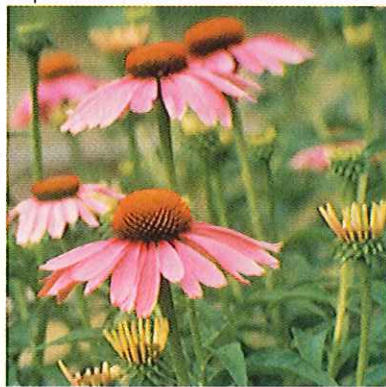
A: Sweet peas are one of my favorite flowers, too, with their amazingly sweet smell and delicate colors. A bouquet of all sweet pea flowers is truly outstanding!

It's important to know that sweet peas are cool season plants and should be started soon to allow them to flower before the heat of summer arrives.

Nick the hard seed coat with a knife or file before planting to help the seed take up water. Plant the seeds about an inch deep in well-drained soil with lots of compost added. If it's too wet to work the soil, plant them in a large pot instead. Keep the soil moist until germination occurs in about 14 days. Provide support for the vines with trellises, teepees, a fence or even a nearby shrub. Mulch the soil around the plants to keep the roots cool and moist. You won't need to fertilize if you use plenty of compost—in fact, too much fertilizer will result in all leaves and no flowers.

Once the sweet peas begin blossoming, pick them every day or two to prevent the plant from setting seed. After the plant sets seed it stops blooming, so the more flowers you pick, the more you'll get.

Purple Coneflower.



Q: When is the best time to apply mulch to my landscaped beds?
- Steve from Mason

A: The best time to mulch is in early summer, after the soil has warmed up and moisture from winter snow and rains has dried. Mulching too early in spring prevents the soil from drying out and can lead to waterlogged soils and root disease. Additionally, the mulch around a tree or shrub should never be more than 2- to 4-inches deep and should be pulled away from contact with the trunk.



Orange Meadowbrite.

Q: I grow purple coneflowers. My neighbor grows a different plant that has a rust colored bloom, and she calls them coneflowers, too. Which of us is using the correct name?
- Christine from Fairfield

A: You are both correct. The yellow or bronze coneflowers are members of the genus *Rudbeckia*, which includes annual and perennial plants having daisy flowers with raised, cone-like centers. You are growing a purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*. It has pink or white-flowered forms, too. Newly available this year is *Echinacea* 'Art's Pride,' also called Orange Meadowbrite coneflower, the first orange-blooming coneflower ever produced.

This is a problem with common plant names. Since there are no "rules" for assigning common names, two different plants often end up with the same name, or sometimes one plant has several different common names! To make sure you get the exact plant that you want, always use the scientific name. **Design**

Sue Trusty is a horticulture instructor, consultant and gardener. E-mail your questions or comments to Sue at strusty@isoc.net. Be sure to include your first name and the area where you live. Happy Gardening!